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EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS, BARRIERS, AND MOTIVATING FACTORS OF  
TRIBAL COLLEGE STUDENTS THROUGH CAPABILITIES APPROACH

BY

FRANCIS APRAN

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Major in Sociology

South Dakota State University

2019

EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS, BARRIERS, AND MOTIVATING FACTORS OF  
TRIBAL COLLEGE STUDENTS THROUGH CAPABILITIES APPROACH

FRANCIS ARPAN

This dissertation is approved as a credible and independent investigation by a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology and Rural Studies degree and is acceptable for meeting the dissertation requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Mary Emery, PhD

Dissertation Advisor

Date

Mary Emery, PhD

Head, Department of Sociology and Rural Studies    Date

Dean, Graduate School

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Mary Emery. Your guidance has been beneficial beyond words and the push to finish has been extremely motivating as I have worked towards the completion of this work. I also would like to give great thanks to Dr. Pat Ahmed, her input and feedback in the methods section and more specifically in where the theory needed clarification were more valuable than I can truly express. To Dr. John Phillips and Dr. Suzette Burckhard, without your willingness to step in and help on my dissertation committee, at what was pretty much the last minute, there's a chance I would not have finished in the timeline I had set.

To the students, faculty, staff, and administration at Sisseton Wahpeton College, I would like to offer my greatest, heartfelt appreciation. Without your participation, cooperation, and willingness to be a part in this study this dissertation would not have happened. To the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Research Office and Heather Larsen, thanks for all of your assistance in working through the research process and allowing me to work with the people of the community at Sisseton Wahpeton.

To my family, I realize that I am not always the best at keeping you all up to date with the adventures I find myself in, and though I may not be the best at conveying my gratitude I appreciate your support through my academic adventures. To my parents, and especially my mom, I know I do not call as much as I should, and at times I could have kept you more up to date with my progress, but you have been a great motivator through this process. To Kymm, you have been one of my closest friends over the years,

and your confidence in me finishing has been unwavering. Meredith, having gone through a similar process, you have been very understanding and have let me work and bow out of events as needed for me to finish, and that is much appreciated.

Friends often become family, and I have been blessed to have a group of friends around that supported, motivated, grounded, and generally kept me moving forward. In some cases, that support essentially became me moving into households, either for a short amount of time or an extended period of time (Paul and Rachel, Steve and Shian, Isaac and Maggie, Alan and Jackie, Jared and Kristen). There have been many others who have offered words of motivation and support, and that group is far too numerous to all name at this moment (Mike, Trevor, Pat, and Benny). To my colleagues at SDSU, a group of us entered the Ph.D. program around the same time, and I am forever grateful for having been around an amazing group of individuals.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Karen Card and Dr. Avoseh (MBM) at the University of South Dakota. You two were very instrumental in my choices to pursue this Ph.D. and your support and mentoring in my time as a student and employee at USD were invaluable. I would also like to extend my greatest amount of gratitude to the phenomenal people at Aims Community College. Without the aid of Mike Dixon, there is a chance that I would still be laboring through syntax, grammar, and all other aspects of the writing process. To Ray Chard, David Jones, and Cathy Beighey, your patience and willingness to work with my hectic dissertation schedule were more appreciated than I can put into words.

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## ABSTRACT

EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS, BARRIERS, AND MOTIVATING FACTORS OF  
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Educational attainment and success have often been linked to an increase in opportunities in life and when viewed from the lens of lifelong earnings, the greater an individual's educational attainment, the greater the lifelong earnings. As a population, Native Americans have the highest poverty rate of all racial categories in the United States at 26.2% (Economic Policy Institute 2016). When looking at the connection between education and poverty, it is vital to note that only 14.1% of Native Americans over the age of 25 have a bachelor's degree or above (US Census 2015). This lack of educational attainment falls well below the general population and the research in the area of attempting to understand the factors that affect Native American educational attainment is still fairly light in volume when compared to other areas of educational study.

This study aims to add to the bank of information regarding Native Americans and their journeys and experiences in higher education. The study is exploratory as capabilities, barriers, and motivating factors within higher education for Native American students will be identified from the perspective of the student. Capabilities approach is utilized to provide a framework in which research participants can share their experiences in higher education, the barriers that have affected them, and the

motivating factors that have kept them progressing in higher education; and all through the perceptions of the students and a focus on local, contextual knowledge.

The study will utilize the qualitative methods of a focus group and semi-structured interviews to capture the educational journeys of the research participants and their thoughts on higher education. Additionally, the study will use content analysis to examine the programming, financial aid, and transferability for students from Sisseton Wahpeton College to universities and colleges in the area to highlight educational capabilities of the research participants. Analysis of the data compiled indicates that there are several barriers and motivating factors that align with findings from previous studies, but the analysis also notes some differences as well. The benefits of capabilities approach are highlighted in the findings as the similarities and differences identified in the research population can add to the depth of understanding in this area, while at the same time, recognizing the diversity of populations of Native Americans and the importance of local, contextual knowledge in this area of study.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Persistence in higher education to graduation and educational attainment can be a challenge for any student. Yet, when one looks at retention and persistence numbers, a startling statistic is revealed; the number of Native Americans with an earned bachelor's degree falls well short of the general population: 14.1% compared to an average of 32.5% (US Census 2015). This places Native American individuals and communities at distinct disadvantages when it comes to the job market and a changing economy, utilizing technology, and addressing community needs and challenges. It would be inaccurate to state that there is one particular reason why Native American students have lower rates of persistence and educational attainment. Rather, there appear to be common themes directly related to the well-being of Native American individuals and their subsequent communities that arise when looking at motivating factors and barriers related to successful Native American educational attainment.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the following study is to add to the information already available regarding barriers and motivating factors for Native American students in higher education. Additionally, the study aims to explore capabilities from the perspective of the students, where capabilities reflect the real opportunities perceived by the students. Recognizing the vast diversity of Native American tribal groups and communities, an approach needed to be adopted that focuses on local and contextual knowledge, yet is flexible enough to identify the commonalities that exist among tribal groups and communities. Capabilities approach provides a framework which allows for local

contextual knowledge to be identified, while at the same time, allowing common barriers and motivating factors to be added to existing knowledge on the subject area (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999). This approach additionally allows for the research participants themselves to identify valued capabilities (real opportunities) and the factors that either lead to or detract from achieved functions (what they actually accomplish) within the methodology of a phenomenological study (Kubatova 2018; Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999).

Research questions addressed by this study include:

- 1) What are the perceived educational capabilities of the research participants as tribal members?
  - a. Examined through attitudes, perceptions, and resources.
  - b. Examined through previous and current educational goals.
  - c. Examined through resources and information of surrounding four-year colleges and universities.
- 2) What have been/are/will be the barriers to educational attainment and success?
- 3) What have been/are/will be the motivating factors to educational attainment and success?
- 4) How important is education to the overall well-being of the research participants?

### **Background Information**

According to US Census data, there are currently 2.6 million individuals in the United States that identify as Native Americans, and this number jumps to 6.6 million

for individuals who identify as being Native American of mixed blood with two or more ethnicities (US Census 2015). This relatively small number accounts for about 2% of the total population in the United States. Native Americans in the United States are a diverse group of 573 federally recognized tribes spread throughout 35 states (NCSL 2018). Historically, Native Americans have had a contentious and conflictual relationship with the federal government of the United States and policies such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830, Dawes Act (1887 General Allotment Act), and termination programs aimed at disbanding federally recognized tribes (Wilkinson 2005).

Various other policies and programs aimed at Native American education highlight drastically changing attitudes toward Native American education over time. Early Native American education was focused on assimilation, originally forced and later what would be termed as coercive (Woodcock and Alawiye 2001). While the late 1800s and early 1900s saw some changes and funds for women and African Americans in higher education, there were fewer resources to support advancements for Native Americans in higher education (McClellan, Fox, and Lowe 2005; Woodcock and Alawiye 2001). The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 gave tribes more self-determination in education, but the following decades focused on termination introduced new challenges such as losing federally recognized status (McClellan et al. 2005; Woodcock and Alawiye 2001). Following this period, activists for expanded self-determination helped to spur the passing of a number of acts that returned some semblance of power to tribal entities and led to the growth in numbers of tribal colleges (McClellan et al. 2005).

Today, there are currently 37 federally recognized and accredited tribal colleges and universities in the United States (AIHEC 2018). These colleges and universities service more than 20,000 students, including Native Americans and others of various racial groups and ethnicities (Saunders 2011). The number of Native American students who attend institutions of higher education away from the reservation and related local communities has also increased, yet educational attainment remains lower than the general population. Measuring education among individuals 25 years or older, the percentage of the Native American population with at least a bachelor's degree falls well short compared to the percentage of the general population with at least a bachelor's degree; 14.1% to 32.5% (US Census 2015). Native American students have lower persistence rates to graduation within 6 years (just 36%), and are responsible for earning just 0.6% of the associate's, bachelor's, and graduate degrees in the US (Adelman, Taylor, and Nelson 2013; Guillory 2009; Jackson, Smith, and Hill 2003; US Department of Education 2009). These numbers highlight the importance of gaining a greater understanding of the issues and barriers that face some Native American students and exploring the motivating factors that push other Native American students through to completion.

### **Significance**

In 1979, Amartya Sen delivered a lecture titled *Equality of What*, in which he argued that utilitarian equality, total utility equality, and Rawlsian equality all had limitations in addressing equality and well-being, and he offered an alternative view on the evaluation of equality (Sen 1979). This approach came to be known as capabilities

approach, and the approach stresses resources, real opportunities (known as capabilities) that stem from those resources, and states of being (known as achieved functions) (Sen 1999). In later writings, Sen began referring to capabilities as freedoms, making the connection that the resources we have available to individuals can affect the opportunities and choices one makes, essentially increasing one's agency (Sen 1999). Seen as not just being a product of one's capabilities, or freedom, but also being a resource that can increase one's capabilities, education then becomes vital to the increasing of one's agency and freedoms. Sen also saw the increase in one's capabilities as being closely related to one's ability to actively participate and engage in the community (Sen 1999). In this sense, he believed an increase in capabilities would not only increase democracy in a community, but that democracy could then also be utilized to increase one's capabilities, or freedoms (Sen 1999).

The importance of education within capabilities approach then rests in the achieved reality of capabilities and in the increase of resources available to the individual in terms of personal ability, information, and resources. In the case of Native Americans and educational attainment, the numbers highlight the need to explore the experiences of Native Americans in higher education to better understand the barriers and motivating factors affecting their educational attainment. When it comes to matriculation into higher education, only 30% of Native Americans who graduate high school enter higher education (Guillory 2009; US Census 2015). Those Native American students that do enter into higher education have the lowest rates of graduation and the number of Native Americans students who have graduated with at least an

associate's degree dropped from 30% in 2000 to 27% in 2017 (Adelman, et al. 2013; Guillory 2009; Jackson et al. 2003; Postsecondary National Policy Institute 2018; US Department of Education 2009).

Changes within education rely on exploring the why of the issues, and in the case of Native American students, what the most common barriers and motivating factors to their educational attainment are. These issues should be explored from the perspective of the student as their insights present a perspective of education that may differ from that of administrators, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders within higher education. In this sense then and in the course of utilizing capabilities approach with indigenous methods in mind, the best methodology to capture the students' lived experiences is the use of phenomenology (Corby, Taggart, and Cousins 2015).

The short-term goals of conducting this research are to provide a better understanding of the barriers and motivating factors of Native American students and to add to the existing data on the subject. The long-term goals of the research include using the data collected through the course of this dissertation work along with data collected in the context of the larger research project at Sisseton Wahpeton College to better serve the students of SWC, the individuals within the local communities, and the local communities and tribe itself. Within the field of sociology, in particular the sociology of education, the significance of this study is a greater understanding of the perceptions of Native American students about higher education and the barriers and motivating factors which could be affecting them. Gaining a greater depth of knowledge



in this area could lead to understanding the structural issues faced by Native Americans in higher education and ways to address those issues.

### **Theoretical Approach of the Study**

According to Amartya Sen in his 1979 lecture, *Equality of What*, capabilities are the choices and options that one has based on the resources that one has available to them (Sen 1999). Capabilities can range from basic necessities such as where one lives to what ability does one have to participate in society politically and socially under one's own agency (Sen 1999). The ability to turn capabilities and capability sets into reality is known as achieved functions and can be affected by barriers beyond the resources that determined the original capabilities and capability sets (Sen 1999). Capabilities approach provides a framework to evaluate well-being, justice, and overall freedoms according to what people can actually choose to do and accomplish (DeCesare 2014; Glassman and Patton 2014; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010). Capabilities approach has been expanded as Sen treats the theoretical framework in an individualistic manner, where Martha Nussbaum believes that the same framework can be utilized to explore capabilities within whole communities (2011).

Exploring community involvement in social and political capacities, Glassman and Patton (2014) noted that the gap in the capabilities of individuals of marginalized populations can affect their involvement within the community. Internalized by marginalized populations, this gap can limit access to vital information and can limit the abilities of an individual to be active within the community (Freire 1970). Capabilities approach has been utilized to examine environmental justice issues related to

indigenous populations and similarly can be used to examine educational justice issues as it relates to the same population (Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010).

In the past, research in the areas of persistence and retention have relied on theories such as Tinto's Model of College Dropout (1975), which focuses on the relationship between academic ability, motivation, and the academic and social characteristics of the institution; and Bean's Model of Student Attrition (1980), which focuses on attitudes and behaviors. While these theoretical approaches provide valuable insight into persistence and retention, it is hard to categorize the diversity of Native Americans into one homogenous group, and a more context-driven approach could provide a greater depth of information on the factors that impact student success.

Capabilities approach, as presented by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011), stresses the importance of local knowledge when determining capabilities. This then creates the need to determine perceived resources of the local populations in order to properly create capability sets that are relevant to the diverse populations of Native American groups (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999). When working with indigenous populations, Kovach (2009) states:

Re-emergent to Indigenous community and emergent to the academy,  
Indigenous inquiry is a relational methodology: its methods are  
dependent upon deep respect for those (or that) which it will involve,  
and those (or that) which will feel its consequence...In both its procedure  
and consequences, Indigenous inquiry asks researchers to demonstrate  
how research gives back to individual and collective good.

With this thought in mind, the reasoning behind the usage of capabilities approach is to stress the collection of data from the perspectives of Native American students, while recognizing that any usage of the data will affect the students themselves as well as the community. The overall goal of using the capabilities approach is to identify areas of need within the educational opportunity structure that can lead to greater participation in the community and democracy (DeCesare 2014; Glassman and Patton 2014).

Democracy here is seen as an increasing of individual and community capabilities that can lead to greater availability of resources and reform (DeCesare 2014; Glassman and Patton 2014).

### **Research Design**

To accomplish the goals of the study, the research utilizes the qualitative methods of a focus group, interviews, and a content analysis. The design relies on phenomenology for the focus group and interviews, which fits well within the contextual focus of capabilities approach, to explore the educational journeys of current and former tribal college students at SWC. The unique nature of the experiences and understanding of the environments of each research participant will be analyzed, interpreted, and defined, highlighting the opportunities, barriers, and motivating factors identified by the research participants. The content analysis will look at a group of colleges and universities around SWC and the programming and transfer policies related to Native American students, and more specifically, students that transfer in from tribal colleges. Comparing the information and resources for Native American students and tribal college transfer students to the educational capabilities highlighted by the

research participants will provide an idea of the real capabilities of the research participants. This information could prove valuable for those interested in future policy research when looking at how to better serve Native American students in their search to attain bachelor's degrees and beyond.

### **Introduction Summary**

The following chapters of this dissertation will break down into five sections. To begin, a review of the literature will examine barriers and motivating factors highlighted in previous studies on Native Americans in higher education and educational attainment and success. The review of literature will also look at the most common barriers and motivating factors identified in other reviews of the literature. As capabilities approach is more focused on local knowledge, the review of literature will serve as a base for comparison after the analysis and where appropriate, themes from the analysis can be added to the existing knowledge. The next chapter will go into the theoretical framework for this study, capabilities approach. Reviewed in this chapter will be the applicability of capabilities approach in relation to this study as well as examples of the theory in other educational studies. Following the chapter on the theoretical framework will be a chapter outlining the methodology chosen for the study and a justification of the methodology. A chapter examining the analysis of the data will follow in which the focus group information and the interviews will be reviewed. This chapter will also include a content analysis and comparison. Lastly, the final chapter will cover a discussion covering a summary of the data as well as limitations, future research, and conclusions.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The Literature Review is separated into six sections: Overview of Previous Reviews of the Literature, Barriers and Motivating Factors Identified in Research, Common Barriers, Common Motivating Factors, Other Barriers and Motivating Factors, and Discussions. Various methods have been used to study Native American educational persistence, retention, barriers, and motivating factors across a variety of institutions.

This review of literature relied on searches utilizing the key descriptors “Native Americans,” “American Indians,” “Retention,” “Barriers,” “Educational Attainment,” and “Higher Education.” The searches included parameters that allowed for book chapters, journal articles, research reports, and dissertations (Pan 2008; Randolph 2009).

Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and the primary research page on the Hilton M. Briggs Library page (South Dakota State University) were used as the primary search engines for finding sources. Research was limited to sources that focused on Native American students within higher education, motivating factors (persistence) and barriers for Native American students in higher education, and background information related to challenges Native American students have faced in the educational system (Pan 2008; Randolph 2009).

The sources were categorized using a content analysis approach to separate them into reviews of literature, background information, general information, and original research (Pan 2008; Randolph 2009). While examining the original research sources, a couple of articles were considered and then ultimately changed to general information as the research conducted within the articles focused on Native American

students and high school with only implications for the future (Ali, McInerney, Craven, Yeung, and King 2014; Klasky 2013). Another article was separated out to general information because it contained a model for Native American retention and success in higher education but contained no information regarding research methodologies, samples, or analysis (Heavy Runner and DeCelles 2002). An annotated bibliography was used to organize the sources highlighting analysis results, historical context, and sample information (Pan 2008; Randolph 2009).

In total, 25 sources were used for the original research analysis and eight sources were used for the review of literature analysis. As most of the sources reviewed are qualitative in nature, statistical analysis was deemed to be unnecessary and a qualitative content analysis was chosen as the primary method of analysis. Content analysis was first conducted on the review of literature sources and common themes regarding barriers and motivating factors were noted (Pan 2008; Randolph 2009). Next, a content analysis was conducted on the sources containing original research following the same methods as the reviews of the literature. Last, the findings of the content analysis for the reviews of literature and the original research were compared and a group of common barriers and motivating factors were highlighted (Pan 2008; Randolph 2009). Examining the findings from the content analysis of the original research, there were some barriers and motivating factors that were not as common, and in some cases, were unique to a couple of studies; these were included as a separate section beyond the main comparative analysis.

### **Overview of Previous Reviews of Literature**

An examination of previous reviews of literature related to Native American retention, motivating factors (persistence), barriers, and higher education reveals differences in focus, yet commonalities in theme. Reviewing the literature in this section, one finds that themes highlighted as barriers often cross over and can also be motivating factors. The following tables highlight barriers and motivating factors identified in reviews of the literature and the paragraphs that come after examining the themes that are present as both barriers and motivating factors.

**Table 1. Barriers Identified in Reviews of Literature**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Financial Constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funding</li> <li>• Lack of information about funding</li> <li>• Poverty</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Cultural Conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of institutional understanding of culture</li> <li>• Lack of integration into a new culture</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Collins 2013; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Prejudice/Racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus climate</li> <li>• Perceived negative stereotypes in courses</li> </ul>	Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013
Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Lack of comfort with faculty/staff</li> <li>• Being away from community and family</li> </ul>	DeLong, Monetten, and Ozaki 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Lack of Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failing to comprehend the rigor</li> <li>• Questions of belonging academically</li> <li>• Lack of adequate study skills</li> </ul>	Larimore and McClellan 2005; Martinez 2014; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Lack of Family Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jealousy</li> <li>• Pull from the family to return to the community</li> </ul>	Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016



**Table 2. Motivating Factors Identified in Reviews of Literature**

<b>Motivating Factors</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Financial Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From family</li> <li>• From tribal resources</li> <li>• Scholarships</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013
Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling welcome</li> <li>• Understanding of mixing of cultural values/beliefs</li> <li>• Involvement on campus</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Larimore and McClellan 2005
Mentoring and Advising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with Native American mentor</li> <li>• Positivity of mentors</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Delong et al. 2016; Martinez 2014
Family Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push to be successful</li> <li>• Emphasis on education</li> </ul>	Collins 2013; Delong et al. 2016; Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013
Institutional Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of culture</li> <li>• Understanding of importance of family/community</li> <li>• Culturally relevant activities for students</li> </ul>	Collins 2013; Delong et al. 2016; Lopez 2018; Martinez 2014
Academic Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridge programming</li> <li>• Preparation in high school</li> </ul>	DeLong et al. 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Lopez 2018
Connection to Culture and Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to give back to community</li> <li>• Strong ties to traditional culture</li> <li>• Strong cultural identity</li> </ul>	DeLong et al. 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Lopez 2018

Family as a theme comes up both as a barrier and as a motivating factor.

Identified as a barrier, family acts to pull students away from higher education for some Native American students as they feel the need to support and respond to family (Lopez 2018; Simi and Matusitz 2016). Family problems and perceived obligations to the family often lead to “stop-out” situations where students simply leave school and return without formally dropping out of the school (Lopez 2018; Simi and Matusitz 2016). Contradicting family as a barrier, data suggests that family also acts as a support for Native American students as they persist in education (Collins 2013; Delong, Monette, and Ozaki 2016; Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013). Encouragement, support, and positive attitudes by family members were identified as being important to success in higher education through various literature reviews (DeLong et al. 2016; Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013).

Financial aid and support are themes that were also identified as being both barriers and motivating factors in the reviews of the literature. Specifically, when highlighted as a barrier, reviews of literature cite financial need, poverty, lack of family support, and a misunderstanding or generally no knowledge of financial aid as the main causes of the barrier (Adelman et al. 2013; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016). Financial aid education and family financial support were identified as motivating factors in contrast to financial issues as barriers (Adelman et al. 2013; Lopez 2018).

Culture and a sense of community have been identified in reviews of the literature as both creating barriers and motivating factors. Culture and Native American

students' ties to culture as a barrier has led to cultural conflict, issues with assimilation and resistance to it, and misunderstandings of culture (Adelman et al. 2013; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Simi and Matusitz 2016). Mosholder and Goslin (2013) point out that this barrier creates a clear lack of cultural capital which puts Native American students at an even greater disadvantage. While culture may lead to conflict for the student, it is also treated as a motivating factor. Many students feel the sense to maintain their cultural identity, a connection to the community, and a need to help the community when they finish school (Adelman et al. 2013; DeLong et al. 2016; Martinez 2014). These students want to complete so they can return home and make a difference. The strong connection to culture and community can have a very positive effect, but that can lead to the creation of another barrier for some students and that is feelings of isolation (DeLong et al. 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016). These feelings of isolation can be compounded perceptions of prejudice and racism (Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013). Integration into the campus community is a motivating factor that may temper some of the negative effects of isolation and perceptions of racism/prejudice (Adelman et al. 2013; Larimore and McClellan 2005).

Lack of preparation for what to expect in higher education, the higher workload expected of students in higher education, and the experience of being a first-generation student make up the final barrier highlighted within reviews of the literature (Larimore and McClellan 2005; Martinez 2014; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016). A lack of math skills, reading skills, writing skills, and technical skills created a

distinct disadvantage as highlighted by various authors (Martinez 2014; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016). The Native American students that entered higher education with some college preparation had some exposure to transition programs and to vocations beyond their education, leading to higher retention and success rates (DeLong et al. 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Lopez 2018). Supplementing the academic preparation needed for success in higher education, or combating the barrier that is the lack of preparation, institutional support from faculty/staff/administrators and comprehensive mentoring programs were motivating factors identified throughout reviews of the literature (Adelman et al. 2013; Collins 2013; DeLong et al. 2016; Martinez 2014). Mentoring programs with highly motivated and positive mentors, pedagogy created to facilitate and adapt to various learning methods of Native American students, faculty and staff that are concerned with and stress educational success of Native American students, and faculty and staff that are understanding of cultural connections are all examples found in the reviews that highlight how institutional support can become a motivating factor for Native American student success (Adelman et al. 2013; Collins 2013; DeLong et al. 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Martinez 2014).

### **Barriers and Motivating Factors in Analytical Review of Research articles**

This analytical review of existing research publications utilizes qualitative methods, quantitative methods, and mixed methods approaches using a variety of measurement tools and data collection. Surveys, interviews, questionnaires, and the use of secondary data provided a breadth of data for researchers. The studies reviewed were conducted at institutions of higher education ranging from smaller tribal colleges

to small liberal arts colleges to large research universities. Common barriers and motivating factors identified in research are outlined in the tables below.

**Table 3. Barriers Identified in Analytical Review of Research Articles**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Lack of Native American Faculty/Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation</li> <li>• Cultural misunderstandings</li> <li>• Comfort/relatability</li> </ul>	Cross, Day, Gogliotti, and Pung 2013; Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgensen 2012; Makomenaw 2012
Lack of Institutional Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of expectations</li> <li>• Lack of adequate advising</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of culture</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2012; Shotton, Oosahwe, and Cintron 2007
Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family obligations</li> <li>• Jealousy</li> <li>• Decision making</li> </ul>	Flynn, Olson, and Tellig 2014; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lee, Donlan, and Brown 2010; Makomenaw 2014
Prejudice/Racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stereotypes</li> <li>• Misinformation</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2014; Makomenaw 2012
Conflict with Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To assimilate or not</li> <li>• “Trapped between worlds”</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Huffman and Ferguson 2007; Watson 2009
Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Being away from home</li> <li>• Marginalization</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Guillory 2009; Makomenaw 2014; Saunders 2011; Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, and Nitzmarim 2013
Financial Constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Cost of education</li> <li>• Lack of information and understanding of financial aid</li> </ul>	Clark 2012; Flynn et al. 2012; Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lee, et al. 2010; Saunders 2011
Lack of Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of preparation in tribal schools for higher education</li> <li>• Lack of resources</li> <li>• Lack of bridge or college prep programming</li> </ul>	Belgarde and Lore 2003; Clark 2012; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008

**Table 4. Motivating Factors Identified in the Review of Research Articles**

<b>Motivating Factors</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<b>Family Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouragement for educational success</li> <li>• Wanting to be a good example</li> <li>• Support system to combat cultural conflict</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Jackson et al. 2003; Lee et al. 2010; Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, and Baysden 2000; Makomenaw 2014; Reyes 2000; Smith, Metz, Moyer, Cech, and Huntoon 2014; Thompson et al. 2013
<b>Social Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Campus staff/faculty</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Flynn et al. 2012; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Jackson et al. 2003
<b>Presence of Native American Faculty/Staff and General Faculty/Staff Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust and comfort</li> <li>• Relatability</li> <li>• Validation</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Mosholder, Waite, Larson, and Goslin 2016; Motl, Multon, and Zhao 2018; Reyes 2000
<b>Connection to Community and Culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to give back</li> <li>• Acting in the best interest of the community</li> <li>• Connection to the campus, creating a sense of community</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Belgarde and Lore 2003; Clark 2012; Ferguson 2007; Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Makomenaw 2014; Montgomery et al. 2000; Motl et al. 2018; Reyes 2000; Shotton et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2014; Thompson et al. 2013
<b>Mentor Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positivity</li> <li>• Creates an environment of support</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Clark 2012; Makomenaw 2012; Montgomery et al. 2000; Mosholder et al. 2016; Shotton et al. 2007
<b>Individual Motivations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater career choices</li> <li>• Personal growth</li> <li>• Validation</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Clark 2012; Jackson et al. 2003; Reyes 2000; Saunders 2011; Watson 2009
<b>Sense of Belonging</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling welcomed</li> <li>• Feeling appreciated</li> </ul>	Mosholder et al. 2016; Motl et al. 2018; Silver Wolf and Butler-Barnes 2015
<b>Financial Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family financial support</li> <li>• Tribal financial support</li> </ul>	Makomenaw 2012; Montgomery et al. 2000; Reyes 2000

## **Common Barriers**

Barriers to retention and educational attainment vary from simply stating that financial constraints are what keeps one from succeeding to a lack of Native American faculty/staff that Native American students can relate to as the reason for a lack of retention and educational attainment. Each of the common barriers identified in the review will be explored in more detail below, starting with the barriers that were most noted by researchers.

### *Financial Constraints*

With an ever-rising cost of higher education, financial constraints in attending higher education are a real issue for all students. Native Americans in the United States have some of the highest rates of poverty which compounds issues related to financial constraints and costs of higher education, and this is not lost on Native American students (Clark 2012; Flynn et al. 2012; Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lee et al. 2010; Saunders 2011). Mentioned by students in one study, the class difference was immediately noticed the first day they stepped on campus (Clark 2012). These students highlighted material goods as well as general perceptions of the world when noting differences in class (Clark 2012). Financial difficulties and disadvantages were noted as a source of motivation or a lack thereof by students when discussing their experiences in higher education (Flynn et al. 2012; Flynn et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2010). For some students, the issue was also a question of understanding financial aid and where to access financial aid (Guillory and Wolverton 2008). As a resource, this lack of information acts as a barrier to increasing capabilities and achieved functions of



Native American students. Financial constraints created by a lack of financial support were often increased when one added children and childcare to the equation as a couple of students mentioned there was often a question of paying for childcare and taking care of the family over their education (Guillory 2009).

### *Isolation*

Isolation as a barrier to educational attainment and success is primarily identified through two themes, distance and being away from home and the feeling of marginalization (Cross et al. 2013; Guillory 2009; Makomenaw 2014; Thompson et al. 2013; Saunders 2011). The issue of distance is explored in a few of the studies, and students mentioned that distance played a part in their decisions of where to attend higher education and their overall feelings of being isolated from what they know (Cross et al. 2013; Makomenaw 2014). Distance created some conflict when dealing with family or community issues which only increased feelings of isolation for students (Makomenaw 2014).

Marginalization for students arose out of environments lacking inclusion and the feeling that there was a lack of support for Native American students (Guillory 2009; Thompson et al. 2013). Students in two of the studies felt that adequate student support services could have helped to neutralize feelings of isolation and marginalization (Guillory 2009; Thompson et al. 2013). The lack of an inclusive environment led to feelings of loneliness as students were unable to integrate into campus communities and lifestyles (Saunders 2011). Isolation as a barrier creates

questions of being welcome and belonging, which can be compounded by cultural conflict and prejudice/racism.

### *Lack of Preparation*

Lack of preparation for higher education and a challenging enough environment to prepare students for the rigor of higher education is an important issue that affects students across the nation (Swail, Redd, and Perna 2003). For many Native American students who graduate from tribally run high schools, this issue may be even direr as it was not just only students noting they may not be fully prepared for higher education, but also by some administrators as well (Guillory 2009). Multiple studies noted that while tribal, state, and federal educational systems are increasingly getting better at preparing Native American students for higher education, there was still a gap in college preparedness (Clark 2012; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008). This lack of preparedness can be seen as a lack of resources that affects the overall capabilities of Native American students, as faculty members in one study noted that the quality of education for Native American students may hold them back in the classes they choose and when they choose to take classes (Guillory 2009). In addition to the lack of preparedness from the high school environment, a distinct difference has been noted between students who completed college prep programming in the summer before their first year of higher education and those who did not (Belgarde and Lore 2003). Those students who were able to succeed in these first-year programs completed more courses in higher education, and though they stated they still felt unprepared, they were able to accomplish more in higher education (Belgarde and Lore 2003).

Questioning whether one belongs in higher education becomes an important issue if the students feel that they will not succeed based on their feelings of preparedness.

### *Family*

Importance of family as a barrier seems counterintuitive, yet when examining the results of various studies, families, family obligations, and family perceptions played a large role in the students' educational experiences (Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lee et al. 2010; Makomenaw 2014). One particular study noted that the majority of the students in the study, 68%, identified the strongest influencer in their education as their family (Lee et al. 2010). In the same study, students mentioned one of their greatest challenges as being balancing school and family obligations, 73% (Lee et al. 2010). Students in two other studies also identified the school and family obligation balance as their greatest challenge in higher education (Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Makomenaw 2014). Families played other important roles as well in Native American students' experiences in higher education and students noted that their families were a large part of the decision-making process and a part of the process of acculturation (Flynn et al. 2014; Makomenaw 2014). Family perceptions also become a barrier in Native American students' experiences in higher education. Students noted that family jealousy and mistrust of higher education created barriers between them and family support (Flynn et al. 2014). Family as a barrier is countered by family as a motivating factor, but if one looks at the number of students who mention family as an influencer, it is important to note how students could feel the pull away from education and "stop out."

### *Lack of Native American Faculty/Staff*

The ability to relate, comfort levels, and validation were all noted by students as important factors to their success in their higher education, and a lack of Native American faculty members and staff created an environment where students questioned their presence in higher education (Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2012; Shotton et al. 2007). Native American students in one study noted that they were supposed to attend a school with a leading Native American studies program, yet when they arrived on campus, they found the faculty to be underqualified (Flynn et al. 2012). In one study, Native American students noted that the presence of Native American faculty and staff provided validation for the time and effort that higher education required (Cross et al. 2013). The lack of Native American faculty and staff, especially in Native American studies programs, led to students questioning their own presence in higher education and whether the system is a good fit (Cross et al. 2013). Comfort levels with non-native faculty and staff members were also an issue for Native American students, as it was not an issue of trust, more of an issue of feeling that if they did not believe faculty and staff could relate to them, they would keep their contact with those individuals at a minimum (Shotton et al. 2007). This situation creates an environment where students may not feel comfortable in approaching faculty or staff to ask questions and share experiences that could affect their higher education.

### *Lack of Institutional Support*

Students are often confronted with Expectations are that one should understand what they are attempting to do when they enter the arena of higher education. Yet, if

there is a clear lack of understanding or information, students cannot access valuable resources that can affect their choices, capabilities, and achieved functions in higher education. Lack of institutional support is recognized as a barrier for Native American students in higher education due to the lack of understanding regarding expectations, a general lack of information and resources, lack of mentoring, and a lack of cultural activities and basic understanding of culture (Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2012; Shotton et al. 2007). Students in one study mentioned frustration at the lack of a real American Indian Studies program, though that is what drew them to the school (Flynn et al. 2012). This, coupled with the lack of a student mentoring program or a lack of enthusiasm and positivity within the mentoring program, developed a system where students felt like they had no one to approach to discuss their frustrations (Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2012; Shotton et al. 2007). Students' feelings revolved around the impact that having Native American mentors and advisors could have had on them had they been present (Cross et al. 2013). As with the presence of Native American faculty/staff, the presence of a good mentoring program creates an avenue of information access for students that increase their understanding and capabilities while in higher education.

### *Prejudice/Racism*

Identified as a barrier by Native American students, racism and prejudice was experienced by students in a variety of ways. Ultimately though, there were two themes that emerged as being most impactful for students in the studies; prejudice and racism experienced by students directly and the more indirect feeling that curriculum

presented was often insensitive towards Native American populations (Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2014; Makomenaw 2012). Students felt that there was a clear lack of knowledge of Native Americans and the knowledge that existed presented itself in the form of negative stereotypes (Jackson et al. 2003; Makomenaw 2012). While some students noted that they felt like their experiences could be learning experiences for their non-native student colleagues and others, some were clearly uncomfortable due to preconceived notions (Makomenaw 2012). It is also of note that these negative stereotypes were observed by students in course materials presented in class, and there was a general feeling that some of the information was purposefully presented in a negative manner (Flynn et al. 2014; Jackson et al. 2003). Another point of concern for students was not just the negative portrayal or stereotypes, but a lack of any relatable information in their coursework concerning Native American populations (Cross et al. 2013; Jackson et al. 2003). Feelings among students were that examples that were readily available were not utilized, and if they were, it was incorrect information (Cross et al. 2013). These feelings create a barrier that adds to the feelings of isolation and cultural conflict.

### *Cultural Conflict*

Many Native American students experience cultural conflict when they begin higher education, especially if they attend a traditional college or university. This conflict centers on culture and questions around acculturation, assimilation, and ties to a racial/ethnic identity (Cross et al. 2013; Huffman and Ferguson 2007; Watson 2009). The lack of institutional focus for some students created a barrier that felt like a split from

their traditional culture, and some students mentioned that they felt as if there was a push to force them to acculturate or assimilate into the culture of the university (Cross et al. 2013; Watson 2009). One particular study revealed that students that were from more traditional cultural backgrounds were more likely to struggle in the process of integrating into higher education (Huffman and Ferguson 2007). The idea of being “trapped between two worlds” was stated by some students as they attempted to integrate their cultural values into the value system of the educational system (Montgomery et al. 2000). Cultural conflict, racism/prejudice, and isolation may create questions of whether one belongs in some environments of higher education and the barrier created may be formidable for Native American students.

### **Common Motivating Factors**

Common motivating factors can often be found as barriers ranging from simple to more complex. Each of the common motivating factors identified in the review will be explored in more detail below, starting with the motivating factors that were most noted by researchers.

#### *Family Support*

Family support as a motivating factor was mentioned throughout numerous studies reviewed. Strong encouragement, aiding with decision making, reinforcing family and traditional values, and aiding in acculturation were some of the ways in which family support served as a motivating factor for students (Bass and Harrington 2014; Flynn et al. 2014; Jackson et al. 2003; Lee et al. 2010; Montgomery et al. 2000). Students mentioned that their families were often the greatest influence in their lives,

and thus, greatly affected their experiences in higher education (Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lee et al. 2010). Encouragement for students presented itself in terms of family pushing students to achieve what others (parents, siblings) had failed at or given up on, pursuing careers that could provide a good livelihood for the students, and the ability to give back to the family (Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Jackson et al. 2003; Makomenaw 2014). Families also acted as a bridge connecting Native American students to the community, traditional ways, and to culture (Flynn et al. 2012; Guillory 2009; Montgomery et al. 2000; Smith et al. 2014). Family support during the acculturation process was identified as key as students' families provided support as the student attempted to balance traditional cultural ways with new environments and new cultures (Flynn et al. 2014).

#### *Connection to Culture and Community*

The bridge created by family to culture and community created a connection for Native American students that emphasizes giving back, belonging, and acting in the best interest of the community (Bass and Harrington 2014; Clark 2012; Ferguson 2007; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Makomenaw 2014; Montgomery et al. 2000; Reyes 2000; Thompson et al. 2013). Giving back to the community and acting in the best interest of the community appear to be some of the key motivating factors as highlighted by the students as many students mentioned their desire to bring positive change to the community through their education (Clark 2012; Huffman and Ferguson 2007; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Makomenaw 2014; Reyes 2000; Thompson et al. 2013). The desire to give back to the community and the effect that it



can have on Native American students as a motivating factor is emphasized when looking at Native American students in the STEM fields (Smith et al. 2014). Researchers were able to identify that the individuality of STEM fields tended to contradict the communal values of Native American students (Smith et al. 2014). Institutions played a key role in the students' connection to community as the more the students saw the campuses and schools as a community, the greater the institutions were considered as motivating factors for the students (Belgarde and Lore 2003; Flynn et al. 2012; Motl et al. 2018; Shotton et al. 2007). Institutions that provided an atmosphere that welcomed the dual nature of culture that Native American students often found themselves in were perceived to be more welcoming and created levels of comfort that encouraged academic success (Belgarde and Lore 2003; Shotton et al. 2007). Connection to community remained strong for many students and though that connection could act as a barrier, it also acted as a motivating force for educational success.

#### *Individual Motivations*

Native American students' individual motivations for persistence in higher education varied. Native Americans responded that they did see higher education as a way to degree attainment and ultimately greater career choices (Saunders 2011). Finishing higher education and proving they could do so for themselves, their communities, and their families also drove individual motivation (Bass and Harrington 2014; Jackson et al. 2003). Students mentioned that they saw the completion of school as a personal triumph and a way to disprove negative stereotypes (Clark 2012; Watson 2009). As students persisted in higher education and utilized individual motivations as a

motivating factor, a development of a strong sense of self occurred for some students and pushed those students forward in their educational careers (Watson 2009).

### *Mentor Support*

Reviewing student services mentioned in various studies, mentoring and academic advising services were highlighted by Native American students as being sources of motivation in academic success (Bass and Harrington 2014; Clark 2012; Makomenaw 2012; Montgomery et al. 2000; Mosholder et al. 2016; Shotton et al. 2007). Students noted that if their mentor was committed, positive, and cared about their academic success, the passion these mentors exhibited was endearing and motivating (Shotton et al. 2007). Students also noted that there was a greater connection with mentors who were also Native American where there was some connection and relatability (Mosholder et al. 2016). For the students in the studies reviewed, the relationship with mentors often lead to situations where the students themselves felt a responsibility to mentor other students themselves, which created another level of motivating factors for the students (Clark 2012; Montgomery et al. 2000). This connection to the mentors and the desire to become mentors themselves reflects cultural values of helping the community and the connection to the community.

### *Faculty/Staff Support Including Presence of Native American Faculty/Staff*

The reviews mentioned not just social or institutional support, but also support from faculty (Bass and Harrington 2014; Mosholder et al. 2016; Motl et al. 2018; Reyes 2000). Students felt that the more they believed the faculty were understanding and that the faculty cared, the more there were opportunities for more trust and greater

connections with the faculty (Motl et al. 2018). Also of importance to students were faculty members who were sensitive to the varying cultures of Native American students and approached topics related to Native Americans in an appropriate manner (Mosholder et al. 2016). Native American students also identified the presence of Native American faculty members as a motivating factor that led to some validation of their higher education aspirations (Reyes 2000). Reyes (2000), in particular, noted the thoughts of one student who thought that the university needed more Native American faculty members as that would serve the student population positively.

### *Social Support*

Social support for students was identified and realized in a number of examples ranging from campus social support to support from friends and other tribal members (Bass and Harrington 2014; Flynn et al. 2012; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Jackson et al. 2003). Social support, such as the presence of friends and acquaintances on campus, aided Native American students in the transition from tribal communities to campuses that do not reflect their home environments (Guillory and Wolverton 2008). Native American students noted that friends who attended higher education with them were perceived as a support system, but they could also be a distraction (Jackson et al. 2003). Student services and activities that stressed inclusion and integration were emphasized by students as creating new avenues of social support which countered the feelings of isolation (Flynn et al. 2012; Guillory 2009). These varying levels of on-campus social support were deemed to be important motivating factors for students and seemed to ease some of the barriers for the students.

### *Sense of Belonging*

Stemming from social support, faculty/staff support, and institutional support, students developed an overall sense of belonging and it was noted as a motivating factor for Native American students in higher education (Mosholder et al. 2016; Motl et al. 2018; Silver Wolf and Butler-Barnes 2015). Sense of belonging for Native American students stemmed from the feeling that not only were they welcomed, but their culture and community values were welcome and appreciated, creating a sense of being close to home (Mosholder et al. 2016). The more students felt that their adoptive campus community environment was comparable to their environment at home, the greater the sense of belonging (Motl et al. 2018). With a sense of belonging, isolation as a barrier was lessened for some students as they felt greater levels of acceptance (Mosholder et al. 2016).

### *Financial Support*

Financial support was cited by a number of students as one of the most important student services that could be provided by colleges and universities (Makomenaw 2012). Worry about financial constraints was one of the primary barriers highlighted above by students across several studies. A number of Native American students are first-generation students, and as such, lack important information regarding financial aid, placing them at a disadvantage (Guillory and Wolverton 2008). Beyond traditional student loans and family support, one of the more important sources of financial aid for Native American students are scholarships (Reyes 2000). This emphasizes the importance of providing adequate student services for Native American

students as many students may not have the knowledge of where to find scholarships and other financial support opportunities. Beyond the school, tribal groups offer a number of scholarships for their students and are often the greatest source of funding for Native American students (Montgomery et al. 2000).

### **Other Barriers and Motivating Factors**

Within the texts reviewed, there were numerous common themes among barriers and motivating factors when it comes to Native American student educational attainment. There were also a few other themes identified as either motivating factors or barriers that were less common but warrant attention. As stated in varying sources, the community and cultural connection is important as a motivating factor for Native American students, yet there are some programs discussed by Native American students in one study that mentioned countering the communal characteristic of Native American culture (Smith et al. 2014). In particular, Native American students felt that science and engineering programs in the STEM fields were more individualistic in nature and did not mesh with the culture (Smith et al. 2014). Smith et al. (2014) note in their study that there is a need for more research in this area as the diverse nature of Native American groups could produce differences from their findings. Another barrier of note is the general lifestyle differences that some students felt on campus (Clark 2012). Students noted that it went beyond simple class differences, and it was differences of goals and religion that created some feelings of tension (Clark 2012). This could be attributed some to culture, but as noted by the students, it goes a bit beyond that into differences in general lifestyle.

Earlier discussion on motivating factors noted the importance of faculty/staff understanding and being more culturally sensitive (Bass and Harrington 2014; Mosholder et al. 2016; Motl et al. 2018; Reyes 2000). Beyond culture, students noted faculty, staff, and administrators need to develop an understanding of the “nonlinear path” of education that some Native American students choose as their path in education (Jackson et al. 2003). This path often leads Native American students to multiple schools, to paths of “stopping out”, and to returning as they attempt to balance their culture with their education and find their way through higher education (Jackson et al. 2003). The last theme that is mentioned in the literature and could warrant further review is the benefits of technology training for Native American students (Belgarde and Lore 2003). Native American students may lack the same access to technology as other students and can be at a disadvantage when it comes to technology use and understanding (Belgarde and Lore 2003). Training for Native American students increases the resources available to them in the form of education and could increase capabilities and motivating factors.

## **Discussion**

Comparing previous reviews of literature with selected research sources, common themes among barriers and motivating factors can be found throughout. These common themes are listed below.

**Table 5. Common Themes Found in Reviews of Literature and Research**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Motivating Factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Constraints</li> <li>• Cultural Conflict</li> <li>• Prejudice/Racism</li> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Lack of Preparation</li> <li>• Family/Lack of Family Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Support</li> <li>• Financial Support</li> <li>• Mentoring/Advising</li> <li>• Integration/Sense of Belonging</li> <li>• Connection to Community/Culture</li> <li>• Institutional Support/Presence of Native American Faculty and Staff</li> </ul>

There are some barriers and motivating factors highlighted throughout this review that are exceptions as they are identified either within the previous reviews of literature or the research, but not both. The presence of these barriers and motivating factors warrants further investigation as their addition could yield the development of programming aimed at aiding Native American student populations in their pursuit of academic attainment. These barriers and motivating factors are listed below.

**Table 6. Barriers and Motivating Factors Needing Further Exploration**

<b>Barriers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Native American Faculty/Staff</li> <li>• Lack of Institutional Support</li> <li>• Individualism vs Culture</li> <li>• Differences in Stated Cultural Goals</li> </ul>
<b>Motivating Factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Support</li> <li>• Academic Preparation</li> <li>• Cultural Sensitivity of non-Native American Faculty/Staff</li> <li>• Access to Technology and Technology Training</li> </ul>

Themes presented through the reviews of literature and the original sources provide a starting point for investigation into Native American student educational attainment, retention, persistence, and success. Financial constraint and support, prejudice/racism, family as a motivating factor and barrier, institutional support, and culture and community are all themes that are most commonly found throughout the literature reviewed. As noted by some of the authors, these common themes are not reflected in all studies regarding Native American students in higher education, and if they are common, they are not always realized in the same manner. This points to the diverse nature of Native American students in higher education and across the nation, and to the need to study the barriers and motivating factors as they relate to local communities and individuals.

Capabilities approach highlights resources available, the capabilities that one has related to those resources, and the achieved functions that one can achieve compared to one's capabilities (DeCesare 2014; Glassman and Patton 2014; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010; Sen 1999). Local context is a key component to the capabilities approach and identifying barriers and motivating factors within higher education for Native American communities can lead to addressing issues within those communities to increase the resources available and the capabilities that arise from those resources. The capabilities approach in relation to motivating factors and barriers has implications for applicability for Native American communities, Native American students, traditional universities and colleges, and tribal colleges.

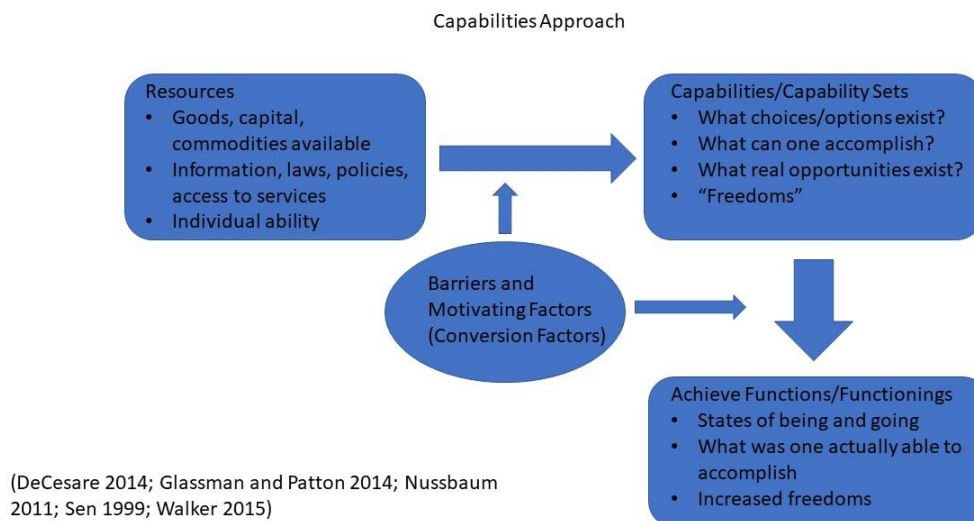


### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

#### **Capabilities Approach**

Presented originally by Amartya Sen in 1979, capabilities approach focuses on the choices and options individuals have based on the resources that are available to that individual (Sen 1999). Later in writings, Sen would come to refer to capabilities as freedoms, which Nussbaum would then refer to as capability sets (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999). These capability sets, or freedoms, range from basic necessities in one's life and the ability to acquire those necessities, such as where one lives, to the ability for one to engage civically under their own agency (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999). The realization of capabilities, or ability to turn capabilities into reality are known as achieved functions or functionings, and in turn, functionings themselves can become resources which can lead to more freedoms (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999). The model below highlights the relationship between resources, capabilities, and achieved functions:

Figure 1. Capabilities Approach Model



What capabilities approach (also known as the human development approach) provides researchers is a framework with which to assess well-being, justice, and freedoms according to the actual opportunities available to individuals (DeCesare 2014; Glassman and Patton 2014; Nussbaum 2011; Schlosberg and Carruthers 2010; Sen 1999). Capabilities approach presents the idea that the goal should be to allow individuals to form their own agency and pursue their own ideas of what they need and their own well-being (Begon 2017). As stated by Begon (2017), “we should have capabilities to control the central domains of our life, rather than capabilities to function.” This particular study will lean more towards the Senian version of capabilities approach as it will not be the goal of the researcher to tell interview participants what their educational capabilities are or should be; rather, the interview participants will

highlight their own capabilities in education as well as the barriers and motivating factors that have affected their educational attainment.

As a model for research, capabilities approach is not a closed model, rather it is a system of inquiry where capabilities can be examined in their relation to achieved functions and the factors that allow for or negate the construction of achieved functions (Bovin, De Munck, and Zimmerman 2018). Capabilities approach should be viewed as a multidisciplinary approach to issues of social justice where open dialogue between various social science disciplines is necessary to fully examine the social, political, and environmental structural systems, along with personal ability, that can affect capabilities and capability sets (Bovin, et al. 2018; Borghi 2018). Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the approach, capabilities approach also affords the researcher a tool with which to examine policy as it relates to real opportunities and capabilities (Britz, Hoffman, Ponelis, Zimmer, and Lor 2012).

Lastly, within the basis of capabilities approach, it is important to highlight the place of democracy, which is pervasive throughout capabilities approach. Sen (1999) makes the point that within a democratic society, human rights are the instruments and the goals. In the effort of empowering people to be engaged, educated members of society, which Freire (1970) calls conscientization, democracy acts as a resource to create an achieved function in its relation to capabilities (Claassen 2009; Sen 1999). The informational basis for which capabilities approach is dependent on creates a sense of a collective of knowledge which links capabilities approach to an applicability within the realm of politics (Bovin et al. 2018; Borghi 2018).

## **Capabilities**

Capabilities, or as Sen would come to call them, freedoms, are the opportunities an individual has to choose what they do and to act on those choices (Nussbaum 2011). Capabilities are the combinations of choices, the preferences shaped by our conditions, the opportunities highlighted by those conditions, and the prioritizations of those opportunities and choices (Basta 2016; Bovin, Laruffa, and Rosenstein 2018; Borghi 2018). Examining capabilities from the lens of capabilities approach, one sees that capabilities refer to the real possibilities of individuals that can affect one's well-being (Britz et al. 2012). When reviewing capabilities, it is important to highlight the primary difference between the two main contributors to the development of capabilities approach, Sen and Nussbaum. From the perspective of Sen, capabilities cannot be standardized and therefore should be context driven, determined by individual actors, highlighting the agency of the individual (DeCesare 2014; Sen 1999). Nussbaum, on the other hand, believed that there are some capability sets that are universal to all individuals and thus, her perspective of capabilities approach centers on individuals sharing ideas on central capabilities (Begon 2017; DeCesare 2014; Nussbaum 2011). For both Sen and Nussbaum the capabilities should be seen as the transformation of resources into choice (Bonvin et al. 2018). The transformation of capabilities from choice into reality are achieved functions, or functionings.

## **Functions/Functionings**

Where capabilities can be seen as the real opportunities, or choices, that are available to an individual, functions should be seen as the realization of capabilities

(Nussbaum 2011). Highlighting the relationship between capabilities and functions, then one can state that capabilities reflect the opportunity to achieve while functions reflect what was actually achieved (Walker 2010). Functions, or functionings, reflect states of doing and achieving, and what is it the individual was actually able to accomplish or do (Nussbaum 2011; Schlasburg and Carruthers 2010; Walker 2015). An example that highlights the relationship between capabilities and functions is an individual who walks to work. The individual who owns a mode of transportation, yet chooses to walk for exercise or other reasonings, has the same achieved function as the individual who walks to work because they must due to no formalized public transportation or they themselves do not have their own means of transportation.

What differs, in the example above, are the capabilities of the individuals and the resources available to these individuals. Out of capabilities come many different functions and though the functions may be the same for individuals of different statuses, the capabilities or choices one made to enter that state of doing may be quite different (Walker 2015). Achieved functions over time can become new sources of information, and more directly, new resources that can be used by the individual to increase capabilities and capability sets. Lastly, it must be stressed that capabilities do not always lead to achieved functions and one of the strengths of capabilities approach is that one can utilize the evaluative characteristic of the approach to examine factors that lead from resources to achieved functions, or conversion factors (Walker 2015).

## **Resources**

Opportunity, or perhaps better stated, real opportunity, is dependent on the social, political, financial, or environmental conditions that an individual finds themselves in (Bonvin et al. 2018). Viewing capabilities as the real opportunities or freedoms that are available to an individual, one finds that these opportunities are dependent on the resources available to that individual (Borghi 2018). These resources vary from the physical; capital, commodities, and goods; to the more abstract; information, access to services, personal ability, and laws and policies (Borghi 2018, Sen 1999). On the surface, by exploring resources, it should be clear that the more capital or commodities that one has, the greater the opportunities, or capabilities, that are available to that individual. From a more abstract lens, it may not be as clear how something like laws or policies can be viewed as resources. To explain this in clearer terms, one can take an issue like voting rights and clarify how something like information, laws, and policies can be a resource affecting capabilities. States that enact strict voter identification laws regarding voting, or do not have clear structures to inform voters on voting laws, restrict the resources available to an individual, and thus, restrict the capabilities of that individual (Sen 1999). As one's functionings grow, so does their access to information, and thus, their capability sets also grow.

## **Barriers and Motivating Factors (Conversion Factors)**

The model presented above provides a visual representation of how an individual can transform resources to capabilities, to achieved functions, and how various factors can intervene to affect this transformation. For the purposes of this

study, the conversion factors, as these affecting forces have been labeled, will be referred to as barriers and motivating factors. These conversion factors as highlighted by Bonvin et al. (2018) and Walker (2015) are broken into various categories which include: personal conversion factors, social conversion factors, and environmental conversion factors; and can directly affect what functions are achieved. For this study, the barriers and motivating factors highlighted by the student will not be broken down into these categories of conversion factors.

Barriers, as presented by the interview participants, refer to those things that arose and either slowed or stopped the students' educational attainment. Whether they were in school or taking time away from school, themes highlighted by the students as barriers will be noted and reviewed in their relation to the students' educational journeys and how they relate to the capabilities highlighted by the students. Motivating factors, as presented by the interview participants, refer to those things that have kept, are keeping, or will keep students moving forward in their educational journey as they move towards degree completion. As with the barriers, the motivating factors will be examined and related back to the capabilities as highlighted by the students.

### **Capabilities Approach in the Social Sciences**

As noted above, capabilities approach is an approach that stresses the need for a multidisciplinary approach to understanding inequalities, and as such, it has been utilized across a variety of subjects. While this particular study utilizes capabilities approach in the realm of higher education, capabilities approach has been used to examine subjects in the following areas: gendered education in South Africa, gender

inequalities, the well-being of children and their understanding of their own well-being, examining the impacts of policy on mental health issues and inequality, examining the roles of job seekers in their job placement and job creation, utilized by social work students as they examined clients understanding of their own well-being, and across studies working with indigenous populations and their perceptions of self-determination (Dominguez-Serrano, Moral-Espin, and Munoz 2019; Egdell and Graham 2017; Kenchaigol 2017; Lewis 2012; Murphy 2014; Schlosburg and Carruthers 2010; Slabbert 2018; Unterhalter 2003).

When it comes to understanding one's own well-being, capabilities approach, especially from a Senian perspective, places a high amount of value on the perspective of the individual. For children to determine their own ideas of well-being, one is asking them to have a level of self-reflection with enough critical thinking skills that they can determine their own capabilities and well-being. Dominguez-Serrano et al. (2019) aimed to do this and concluded that children are often left out of decisions that directly affect their well-being and that children in fact have levels of self-determination regarding their own well-being that differs from the adults around them.

Utilizing capabilities approach to examine structures in society, Egdell and Graham (2017) and Lewis (2012) both used capabilities approach to explore policy related to well-being in the areas of mental health and job placement respectively. Egdell and Graham (2017) took a particularly interesting approach in that their use of capabilities approach centered on not just understanding young people's perspectives on the job market, but rather they were concerned with understanding young people's



agency when it came to job placement programming and job creation. This form of capabilities approach really gets to the depth that one can study when utilizing capabilities approach. Exploring the ideas of well-being in the area of gender, Kenchaigol (2017) made use of capabilities approach from the perspective of Nussbaum to highlight a list of gender specific capabilities that are contextually relevant to gender well-being. Unterhalter (2003) took an approach that highlighted the policy failures of some educational programming using capabilities approach, while at the same time, pointing out that capabilities approach can fail to examine contextual differences such as gender, if these differences are not specifically highlighted.

Most importantly for relevance to this study, a variety of research has been conducted in the area of self-determination and indigenous (Native American) populations using capabilities approach to highlight community capabilities and functions. In the vein of connecting the importance of self-determination to well-being, Murphy (2014) uses capabilities approach to highlight community capabilities and their relationships with self-determination and an effort to remove lingering feelings of colonial control. In this sense, self-determination and agency is not just seen as a human right, but rather as a human need, and one of great importance to native communities (Murphy 2014). Similarly, Schlasburg and Carruthers (2010) utilized capabilities approach in their examination of the self-determination of Native American communities as it relates to environmental justice issues. While Sen and Nussbaum may state that capabilities approach is not a true justice approach, Schlasburg and Carruthers (2010) use of the approach highlights how policies can both create and limit capabilities

of communities and individuals, especially Native American communities when it comes to limiting true self-determination.

### **Capabilities Approach and Higher Education**

Capabilities approach and its place in higher education research is highlighted by DeCesare (2014), who noted that education is not just important in examining capabilities, but also that capabilities approach must be used to explore individuals' resources when it comes to educational capabilities. Additionally, it has been noted that capabilities approach needs to expand beyond simply examining outcomes in education as achieved functions and needs to include more examinations of policy and resources when it comes to educational opportunity and decision making (Gale and Molla 2015). Hayter and Cahoy (2018) take this a step further in stating that capabilities approach can be used to explore not just the expectations of society on higher education, but how higher education can adapt to the changing needs of individuals and communities, and thus, changing capabilities.

Walker (2010) takes the step of linking critical pedagogies with capabilities approach as it can be used to examine how to improve states of well-being, which includes educational opportunity. The concerns of capabilities approach creates the right framework to explore issues of educational justice as it relates to resources and the decisions that individuals can make in regards to their educational capabilities (Walker 2010). Walker (2010) takes similar steps to Nussbaum in highlighting a basic list of capabilities; in this case, contextually related to education, that are based on empirical research in education. These capabilities are multi-dimensional and include:

practical reason, educational resilience, knowledge and imagination, learning disposition, social relations and social networks, respect, dignity, and recognition, emotional integrity, and bodily integrity (Walker 2006). The danger as seen by Walker (2010) is that these capabilities will somehow become learning outcomes as some may be unable to grasp the overall contextual nature of capabilities approach. This danger, however, is outweighed by the practical application of capabilities approach and how it can be used to address inequality in education and beyond (Walker 2010).

### **Capabilities Approach and Critical Sociology**

The relationship of capabilities approach to greater sociology lies in the vision of capabilities approach as a multidisciplinary tool that can be implemented to evaluate well-being and individual freedoms (Bonvin et al. 2018). Bonvin et al. (2018) point out that in the perspective of Sen, and then later Nussbaum, there can be no political evaluation without recognizing economics, no economics without recognizing sociology, and so on. This recognition of capabilities approach as a multidisciplinary approach opens the theory to usage within sociology and the implications for evaluation creates a connection of capabilities approach to critical sociology. Another tenant of capabilities approach as presented by Sen is the idea that the approach itself is still evolving and incomplete, which opens the approach to usage with other theories and concepts within critical sociology (Bonvin et al. 2018). The use of multiple perspectives and frameworks is a key component of critical thought and capabilities approach and its openness and incompleteness make it a theoretical framework which can be used at multiple levels of evaluation and thought (Bonvin et al. 2018).

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The goal of this research is to explore and add to the current understanding regarding the barriers and motivating factors related to educational attainment and success for Native American students. To accomplish this goal, the research will utilize a combination of Sen's and Nussbaum's versions of capabilities approach. Specifically, from the perspective of Sen, the aim of the research is to gain an understanding of capabilities and barriers impacting students' success or lack of success in educational attainment from the experiences of the students themselves, thus relying on local knowledge to identify barriers and motivating factors (Sen 1999). In an attempt to add to the current knowledge regarding this area of study, Nussbaum's capabilities approach will be utilized to the extent that when analyzed, some barriers and motivating factors may fit previously identified categories (Nussbaum 2011). Whereas Sen believes that within capabilities approach, information gathered should be strictly based within local context, Nussbaum believes that there are some capabilities that can be identified as being somewhat universal (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999). Therefore, though this research will not be dependent on specified capabilities, it will where appropriate, categorize barriers and motivating factors into previously recognized categories to add to the pool of knowledge to help push this area of study forward.

The aim of the study is strictly exploratory in nature and will utilize the qualitative methods of a focus group, interviews, and a content analysis. First, a review of the literature regarding Native American persistence, retention, educational

attainment, and capabilities approach was completed to structure the focus group and interview questioning. Second, a focus group consisting of current and former Sisseton Wahpeton College (SWC) students was conducted in order to assess and revise the interview instrument in comparison with the research questions to determine if there are lines of questioning that need to be explored that are not a part of the original interview instrument. The research questions directing this study include inquiries into; what are the perceived capabilities of the research participants as tribal members, what have been/are/will be the barriers to educational attainment and success, what have been/are/will be the motivating factors to educational attainment and success, how important is education to the overall well-being of the research participants?

Third, interviews with current and former SWC students were undertaken to explore the research questions centering on attitudes, perceptions, goals, resources, barriers, motivating factors, and thoughts on education and well-being. Finally, a content analysis was completed, exploring the resources and information available on college and university websites of the ten colleges and universities located within 173 miles of SWC. This final piece will provide valuable information to assess the opportunities and resources available to students who may wish to continue their education beyond SWC or to transfer for a four-year college/university.

### **Phenomenological Focus Group and Interviews**

The focus of this particular study centers on advancing and adding to the current depth of research in the area of understanding Native American educational attainment in higher education. As the focus is to add to the depth of understanding, qualitative

methods were chosen within an exploratory context. Concentrating on lived experiences, this study will rely on phenomenology to examine the various experiences of individuals within their journey towards educational attainment and degree attainment within their cultural and social worlds (Creswell 2013; Kubatova 2018; Makomenaw 2012). Phenomenology provides a framework of methodology for the researcher where an understanding of the conditions in which one finds themselves, coupled with the details of the lived everyday experiences of the research participants can be examined (Costelloe 1996).

Additionally, within the framework of local, contextual knowledge (capabilities approach) and an attempt to understand the lived experiences of the research participants, phenomenology provides a reference to examine the world of the research participants through their experiences and their perceptions of the world around them (Kubatova 2018). Examples of areas of study within education that have utilized phenomenology as their primary research methodology include: exploring students' experiences using smartphones in learning environments (Chan, Walker, and Gleaves 2015), science teaching through educational interrogation (Ginev 2013), understanding teacher emotion and authenticity (Ramezanzadeh, Reza Adel, and Zareian 2016), and exploring Native American student experiences in predominately white university environments (Makomenaw 2012).

The diversity of research areas utilizing phenomenology highlights the flexibility and adaptability of the approach when concentrating on individuals' varying experiences within a common phenomenon; in this case, educational attainment and

the barriers and motivating factors that lie within for Native American students. The semi-structured nature of the research fits within the frame of phenomenology and patterns and themes will be identified as they relate to the research questions (Corby et al. 2015). As the primary focus of the research study will be to identify common barriers and motivating factors for Native American students in their educational journeys, the aim of the research will be to interpret, describe, and condense the data collected to add to the current information available in this subject area (Creswell 2013; Makomenaw 2012). To fit within the framework of capabilities approach, phenomenology allows for the research participants to share their lived experiences and their reflections of their structural conditions from their own unique perspectives, while at the same time allowing for some interpretation and description of those shared experiences (Chan et al. 2015; Costelloe 1996; Creswell 2013; Makomenaw 2012).

In the interest of maintaining methodologies that are consistent with good indigenous research, the researcher remained as contextually conscious and location-minded as possible (Kovach 2009; Makomenaw 2012). Recognizing the sensitive nature of working with Native Americans and tribal groups, cultural awareness was an important piece of the study and all steps were taken to work with the local culture, tribal government, and SWC in mind. The use of phenomenology in this area is not without some criticism though. As Kovach (2009) mentions, phenomenology is great for exploring individuals' unique experiences, but it veers away from a critical nature that may be needed in some indigenous studies. While phenomenology may not be considered a critical approach from the perspective of Kovach, capabilities approach is

one that focuses on choice, well-being, and justice. Therefore, the combination of capabilities approach and phenomenology provides a framework with which to be critical regarding resources and capabilities within the worlds of Native American students.

Further emphasizing indigenous methodologies, the research presented reflects principles highlighted by Straits, Bird, Tsinajinnie, Espinoza, Goodkind, Spencer, Tafoya, Willging, and the Guiding Principles Workgroup (2012). These principles include the importance of research with Native American communities being Native American centers, respect for the community and the individuals, the importance of self-reflection, the importance of building authentic relationships, and the importance of co-learning and ownership (Straits et al. 2012). Reflecting on these principles; relationships with key informants aided in developing levels of trust, the research participants were allowed a space to share and reflect, the larger research design will include students who are members of the community as researchers, and all of the data will be turned over to the tribal research office and Sisseton Wahpeton College to share with the community in the ownership of the data. In a review of research, research design, and programming similar principles and conclusions were presented in areas such as; examining trust and capacity building in pre-engineering programs (Tinant, Kant, LaGarry, Sanovia, and Burckhard 2014; experiences of tribal college transfer students (Makomenaw 2012); and presenting indigenous methods for usage in geographic research (Louis 2007).



Stated above in the research design, it is noted that the first step after identifying common barriers and motivating factors was to conduct a focus group with current and former SWC students. The purpose of the focus group was to ensure that the interview instrument asked the right questions as they relate to the research questions within the overall project. The focus group consisted of five students, was completed at SWC, and an hour and a half was spent with the students. Interview questions presented in the focus group centered on attitudes and perceptions about higher education, family educational background and student's educational journey, barriers and motivating factors within those educational journeys, and their thoughts on education as it relates to their overall well-being. After an analysis of the focus group data, it was determined that a question should be added regarding resources and education to the interview instrument to accurately capture capabilities from the students' perspectives.

The interviews took place over the period of one year, were all conducted in person at SWC when the researcher was present at SWC, and were between 40 minutes and one hour in length. Semi-structured in their nature, the interview questions all reflected inquiries into themes contained in the research questions; while allowing for the research participants the openness to be reflective and share their experiences within education from their own perspectives. This fits well within phenomenological research as the students were given the space and time to examine the phenomenon of their own educational experiences within the conditions of the world around them.

## **Content Analysis**

Capabilities approach stresses the link between resources available and the “real” opportunities that are available to students which are referred to as capabilities (Sen 1999). The resources available to individuals includes information and the ability to access information. In an effort to fully grasp the information readily available to students regarding educational opportunities, 10 colleges and universities were selected and a content analysis was conducted exploring information about programming and transfer opportunities for Native American students coming from SWC. The background of the researcher became a valuable tool in this step of the research as an understanding of where to find and access information regarding programming and transfer provided a baseline for analysis of the accessibility of the information for Native American students searching for this information.

When analyzing these websites and the information found, the administrative background of the researcher was kept in consideration. Knowing what terms to search for and how to navigate college websites, the researcher may have more capabilities when looking at higher education opportunities than the research participants based on experience as a resource. Recorded in the analysis is the accessibility and ease of finding information on Native American programming and transferability. The ease of students’ ability to find this information is important when exploring the capabilities of students in higher education, and if there were some struggles for the researcher to find the information, then students with little experience in higher education could be expected to struggle. Finally, it is worth noting that many students who attend SWC live in very

rural areas and may not have access to high speed internet or even technologies required to find this information online. If the students were to explore transfer opportunities while they were physically on campus at SWC, they would need a certain level of understanding of where to look and how to navigate the websites. To account for this, the students were presented with a question examining their perspective of the resources available to them at SWC as they relate to transfer and programming.

### **Sample**

The population of students that is the focus of the research are current and former Sisseton Wahpeton College (SWC) students. Being that the student population at SWC is relatively small when compared to other colleges (SWC currently has around 200 students while South Dakota State University has around 12,000), current and former students were chosen as the research population to expand the pool of possible research participants. Also, as the research in this study will be utilized by SWC in their retention and enrollment plans in the future, the usage of former students ensures that a number of barriers and motivating factors can be identified and explored in an effort to increase the college's ability to serve their student population.

The research population was limited to Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate tribal members to better get an idea of the barriers and motivating factors of the community members themselves without interference from other Native American students at the college who might be from other tribal groups. This was done to fit within the local context framework of capabilities approach that is presented by Sen (1999). The research population was limited to an age range of 18-60 and was kept as a fairly large

age range in order to account for the relatively high age of the average student at SWC, which is currently at 32 years of age. For the focus group that was conducted, five students were present. The size of the sample for the interviews was set at 20, but due to some uncontrollable variables, namely weather and school closures due to weather, the total number of interviews completed is 17. As the research project is meant to continue beyond the scope of this dissertation, the number of interviews completed will increase to 25 once the larger research project is completed. It is worth noting that while this sample population is fairly small when compared to other studies, it is relatively generous when one considers the smaller overall research population in terms of numbers.

To recruit the group of students to participate in the focus group, the use of key informants in the form of SWC instructors was chosen. Key informants act as an important link between the researcher and the research participants (Bernard 2013). In this research study, the use of key informants proved invaluable as it is important to not just know and understand the local culture, but to also have a level of trust with the research participants to help ensure accuracy in the respondents' information (Bernard 2013). To recruit the interview participants, key informants were utilized once again in conjunction with research flyers. The key informants were provided with copies of the flyers, information regarding the research project, and flyers were posted around Sisseton Wahpeton College. After the first round of interviews were completed, snowball sampling was then utilized to gain access to students that may have been wary

about initially participating and to gain access to former students that may no longer be present on campus (Bernard 2013).

Although the research itself may seem harmless on the surface, it was still vitally important to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants throughout the duration of the research. To ensure the anonymous nature of the research, the contact list of research participants was coded and kept on a secure drive at SWC. Access to this drive was/is limited to the primary investigator and is password protected at two different levels of access. Research participants were informed of the confidential nature of the research, and signed letters of consent have been kept in a secure location with the researcher. Lastly, after the interviews were transcribed and cleaned of any identifiers, the recordings of the interviews were destroyed to prevent any recognition of voice. Contact information has been saved and maintained on the secure drive at SWC in the case that there are any follow up questions, which the research participants were informed of after completing the interviews. This contact list will be deleted upon completion of the larger research project being conducted beyond the main scope of this dissertation.

The second part of the analysis consists of examining programming and services at colleges and universities where students from SWC might look to transfer after completion of their associate's degrees. Identifying distance and isolation as two barriers listed in the literature review, colleges and universities were selected for analysis based on their proximity to SWC. The number of colleges and universities selected for the analysis was 10, and these colleges range in distance to SWC from 56

miles to 173 miles. The sample of colleges and universities selected were limited to four-year colleges and universities for the opportunity of transferability to a four-year degree. This is not to say that students who finish at SWC do not transfer to other two-year colleges; more that within the framework of capabilities approach, if students mention they would like to obtain a bachelor's degree, then four-year colleges and universities should be the focus of the analysis.

### **Themes, Categories, and Coding**

Analysis of the focus group and the interviews began with listening to and transcribing the interviews. All identifiers were removed to protect the identity of the research subjects and the interviews were, in some cases, gone over multiple times in order to ensure accurate transcriptions. In order to ensure as accurate responses as possible, interview participants were often asked to clarify their responses, and the interviewer used a reflective process to help clarify responses when necessary (Makomenaw 2012). Analyzing for themes identified through the experiences of the research participants, significant statements were highlighted manually within the transcribed interviews (Creswell 2013; Makomenaw 2012). These statements were placed into a spreadsheet containing categories based on the research questions (thoughts on education, goals within education, resources, barriers, motivating factors, and thoughts on well-being). Within each category, the responses of the participants were then placed into subcategories to identify capabilities, barriers, and motivating factors (Creswell 2013). Commonalities of barriers and motivating factors identified by the research participants were then compared to the barriers and motivating factors

identified in the literature. The barriers and motivating factors identified in the literature were not used as a guide in interpreting the research responses, and where appropriate, categories unique to these student experiences were highlighted.

Analysis of the resources and information available on the selected college and university websites consisted of a coded content analysis. Utilizing the following search terms; Native American programs, Native American financial aid, tuition assistance Native Americans, transfer agreements with tribal colleges, MOUs tribal colleges, transfer process, transfer credits, and transfer degree completion; documentation and website information was coded according to a set of themes (Bernard 2013). The themes identified included: financial assistance, transfer credits, degree completion, and Native American programming and support. This information was then compared to the responses of the interview participants who noted they were interested in or would actively be pursuing education beyond their associate's degree and time at SWC (Bernard 2013). This analysis was completed in order to identify the actual capabilities of the students as they relate to the resources and information present in terms of transferability.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis**

Capabilities within capabilities approach refer to the real opportunities or choices one can make based on the resources available, and within the approach conversion factors refer to the factors that affect whether a student can turn capabilities into achieved functions. The following chapter will first highlight the analysis of the focus group and the conversation with research participants utilizing the original interview instrument. Descriptors of the population including their educational journeys and the educational backgrounds of their families will follow the analysis of the focus group. Next, the analysis will look at the educational capabilities of the interview participants from their perspectives. After examining the educational capabilities of the respondents, barriers and motivating factors will be explored, and the analysis will finish up with a comparison of educational opportunities with the future plans of the students.

### **Focus Group Analysis**

A focus group was utilized to assess and refine the interview instrument and the focus group took place a month prior to the first interviews at Sisseton Wahpeton College. The focus group consisted of five students, two female students and three male students, and all of the students are current students at SWC. Educational backgrounds of the students were similar in that the students all had taken some time off after high school prior to their time at SWC with the exception of one student who did attend a university away from the community right after high school. Educational levels of the parents of the students in the focus groups varied from high school through to graduate



level education, and most of the students reported their parents had some form of a higher education degree.

The students noted their goals had changed some in the course of their educational journeys since finishing high school, and they all felt they had resources to complete their current goals. Barriers identified by the students in the course of their education included; financial constraints, family, and a work/school balance. For the one student that attended a university away from the community the barriers included isolation, lack of preparation, and a lack of information. The lack of information was in relation to a lack of understanding about financial aid, where to go to ask for help, and not understanding the environment of a large university (such as teacher to student ratios and is it okay to ask for help). Motivating factors highlighted by the students included; family, financial support, desire for a career change, individual motivations, and a desire to give back to the community and maintain cultural knowledge.

The responses of the students were instrumental in reviewing and revising the interview instrument. Questions about overall resources in regards to education were added and prompts were added to help the student explore the various barriers and motivating factors they may have experienced in their educational journeys. An explanation of well-being and freedoms from the perspective of capabilities approach was added to provide clarity about the question as there was some misunderstanding in the focus group regarding that question. Lastly, a question was added to the interview instrument to explore whether students had looked at education beyond SWC and what had they found in regards to programming and opportunities for tribal college students.

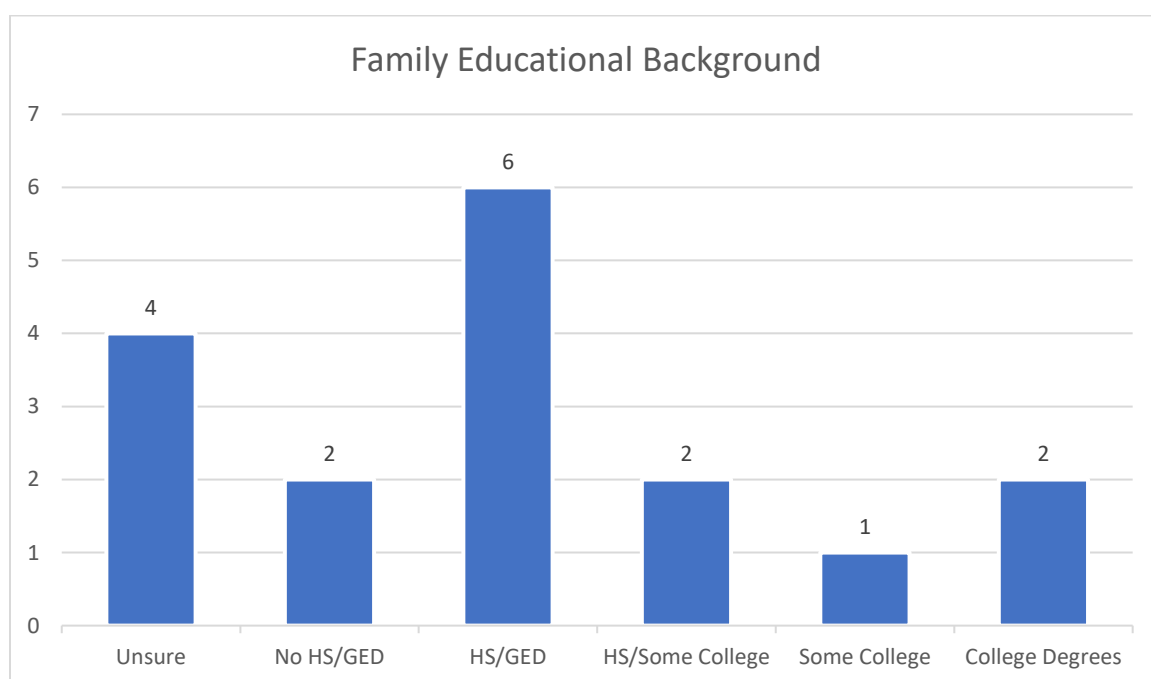
### **Interview Population Descriptors**

The student research population was limited to enrolled tribal members at Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate between 18 and 60 years of age, and they needed to be either current or former SWC students. The students were evenly represented along lines of gender, with 9 female interview participants and 8 male interview participants. Research participants were equally split in terms of their secondary educational backgrounds with 9 of the interview participants stating they graduated high school and 8 of the interview participants stating they had earned their high school equivalency in the form of the GED. With the exception of one student, who went from high school to SWC and is currently a student, all of the students have similar educational journeys as far as time in and out of higher education.

Five of the research participants did not attend higher education following their high school graduation or high school equivalency. Eleven of the research participants attended higher education immediately following their high school graduation or high school equivalency. Within this group of students, four of the students attended school away from the area and one of the students attended school online with the expectation of leaving the area. The other six students attended SWC immediately following their high school graduations or equivalencies. The research participants have all, with the exception of the one noted earlier, taken at least one year away from higher education and all with the exception of one have had multiple attempts at higher education.

The educational backgrounds of the research participants' parents were also explored as information contained within the family acts as resources for educational capabilities. The educational backgrounds of the parents varied and were separated into categories based on whether the parents had no high school equivalency, high school graduation or equivalency, a combination of some college and high school equivalency, some college, degrees attained, and unsure. The following graph below represents the educational backgrounds of the families as reported by the research participants:

*Figure 2. Breakdown of Family Educational Background/Level*



Most of the family educational backgrounds of the research participants are either at or below high school level education. Only two students reported that their parents had earned college degrees, and one of those students reported that one of their parents had earned a graduate degree.

## Perceptions and Capabilities

Analysis in this section focuses on exploring the research questions centered on perceived educational capabilities, attitudes, resources, and goals. Overall attitudes and perceptions of higher education reported by the respondents were very positive. All but one of the interview participants mentioned they believed education was important to opening and creating opportunities, to understanding the world around them, and that it was important to better oneself through education. There was one respondent that mentioned negative attitudes regarding higher education, and it was in relation to experiences felt in their first try in higher education. This participant stated that while they saw the value in education, they did not always see it as a good fit culturally, which is a direct result of her experiences at a university away from the area.

I felt more comfortable at the community college level here, because, I was surrounded by other Native American students. I also attended at the university level and I got stereotyped, I was talked badly to because of my race, and I was reminded that I was there because I received a scholarship and the dean would always remind me that we were there because they had to let us in, because we were a minority. And that there were other students there that had higher GPA that they had to say no to. It was not a very familiar place for us. (213)

Students were questioned about the resources they had available to them regarding higher education and what their goals were within higher education, creating a list of capabilities from the perspective of the respondents.

### *Resources and Capabilities*

Interview participants were asked about the resources they had available to them when they originally completed high school or their high school equivalencies, and then asked about their original goals. Eleven of the respondents stated that in relation to their original goals in higher education, they had sufficient resources to make informed decisions about their opportunities in higher education.

I think they did a good job. I went to High School A, and they kind of did a good job, they had a lot of fairs and stuff like that for other colleges...It wasn't nothing to do with the schools or anything like that, it was just my own personal choice (when deciding to go to higher education or not).

(214)

Six of the respondents noted that they felt as if there was a lack of resources in terms of information about higher education. As one student noted, "I guess I wish I had more resources, more information about schools and what was out there" (202). Another student noted that at the family and community level, there may not have been enough experience in higher education to make informed decisions:

You feel like opportunities were there but being that you know maybe in your family or in the community nobody had that educational experience to share with you, so you just didn't know. (208)

Original goals in higher education ranged from simply starting general education requirements to bachelor's degrees. Of those that mentioned there was a lack of resources regarding opportunities in higher education, two attended higher education away from the area right after high school or their high school equivalency, and one originally planned on attending higher education away from the area. Based on the resources available to them, the overall perceptions of the students reflect that around a third of the students believed their original capabilities were limited by a lack of resources.

Following up, the students were then asked about their current goals in higher education and the resources they now had available to them. Goals within higher education reported by the respondents did not change much, and for some, it advanced from simply starting school to now obtaining an associate's degree at the least. When asked about resources available to them, all of the interview participants reported they believed they had the resources to be successful and to make informed decisions about higher education.

They're (SWC Staff/Faculty) very supportive. Yeah, I really love the atmosphere here. I mean they're very friendly. They're willing to help you, you know if you need any help in anything, tutoring, anything, you

know counseling, anything like that. They're really supportive in helping you. (217)

Capabilities in the form of real opportunities for the students then increased with their attendance at Sisseton Wahpeton College through the various levels and means of support provided at SWC in the form of information, financial aid, and the faculty and staff present.

### *Education and Well-Being*

Within capabilities approach is the belief that the more capabilities one has, the greater the number of choices one can make, and therefore, the greater that individual's personal well-being (Sen 1999). Well-being from this perspective is directly related to what one can possibly accomplish in utilizing those resources. Education and the ability to understand and think critically then becomes a resource in that it adds to the individual's ability and the information available to that individual. The research participants were presented with a question to explore their understanding of their own well-being and the place of education as it relates to their well-being.

Responses varied to this question, and the interview participants identified a few factors that can affect their well-being related to education. These were separated out into the following categories: opportunities, credibility, freedoms, better sense of self, civic engagement, and ability to question existing structures. The most common response to this question centered on the opportunities. Respondents identified the connection of education to opportunities and then stated that with an increase of

opportunities, there was an overall increase of well-being. In all, 14 students explored the connections between opportunities, education, and well-being, and all of the students spoke of opportunities in terms of careers. One of the female respondents specifically mentioned the investment they saw education to be and the benefits that education would bring in the long-run. Related to education is credibility and the obtaining of credentials, and two students mentioned this as being important and an important consequence of education. As one male respondent stated:

Being able to have, like if you can have a degree, or a degree on your resume, you'd be able to prove on paper, that proves that I'm committed, that I've done things to get this degree, it shows a lot compared to someone who does not have a degree. (207)

These two students saw education as a means to provide evidence that they know the material, but also that they can start and finish a program or project.

Eleven of 17 respondents did make mention in their responses of opportunities beyond career opportunities, and these were mainly in the areas of civic engagement, freedoms, and ability to question existing structures. Six of the students made statements that included "a way to understand more of the issues of the community," or "opportunities to help the community." Students connected education to a better understanding of the communities around them, and how they could be more active in the community. Freedoms, as identified by the students, centered around the ability to make choices about life beyond careers and statements of the ability to do what one



chooses because of an understanding created by increasing education. Two of the respondents stated that they saw education as a means to question the world around them, which granted them a sense of well-being. As one respondent put it:

I challenge our people, you know about our sovereignty, and about what our standards are as a people. How are we going to go forward into the future with having that as our foundation, meaning Western society, and then sprinkling our cultural things into...having our culture as the foundation of education and then taking things from Western education should be the goal. (209)

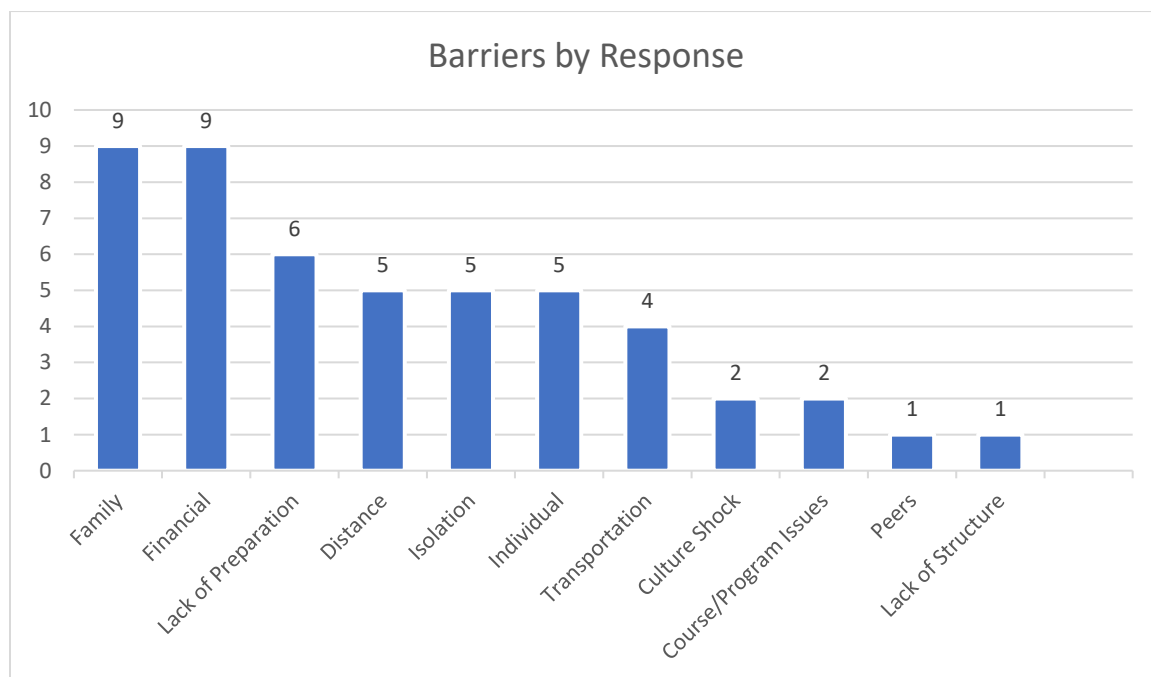
Lastly, two students viewed education as a means to bettering their understanding of who they are and their own sense of self, which related to their overall well-being. In all of the interviews, the students identified a connection to well-being and education and saw education as a means to increase their overall sense of well-being.

### **Barriers**

Barriers to educational attainment and success consist of the factors that contribute to the struggles of students in their educational journeys or any factors that keep students from educational attainment or success. The aim of the questioning in this section of the interview was to allow the students to share, from their own perspectives, the factors that affected the most when it came to them not achieving what they wanted to originally, or anything that might currently be affecting their progress or progress in the future. The responses were interpreted and categorized

based on common themes and were analyzed to explore the research questions of current, past, and future perceived barriers. The respondents identified several barriers and the chart below highlights the responses with the following sections providing further details.

*Figure 3. Breakdown of Barriers by Response*



### *Family*

Family as a barrier manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout the interview process and nine students in total responded that family was a barrier in one form or another to their educational success. Having children (7 respondents) and having to take care of the family as the primary caretaker (3 respondents) were the most prevalent factors that arose as barriers in relation to the overall theme of family as a barrier. For a number of these students, having children young put them in the

position of what to do to take care of the family, which led to choosing work instead of school. Three of the respondents noted that they were in higher education when they had their first child and that was the primary reason they stopped out.

I guess it would just be like going to school and taking care of my son, and making sure, like his needs are met, and mine as well...I wouldn't say child care because now he's old enough to go to school and so he has schooling. (201)

Two of the respondents did note that while children and having a family were barriers in the beginning, their kids were grown and now they felt like they could dedicate time to higher education.

Family also became a barrier in the form of addressing expectations like coming back to the community to help take care of ailing family members. One respondent noted in particular a situation where they had left the area to try school once again, and though things were going well, the illness of a parent brought them back to the area and away from higher education.

I did well (off the reservation at school for the second time), but they told me that my father's health was failing. And so I came home to take care of him. (213)

This family attachment was identified by another student in response to whether they would be willing to leave the area to complete a bachelor's degree, as the student

mentioned “being away, I might not be able to talk to them as much as I want to” (210). Attachment to family has been noted in the literature as both a barrier and motivating factor, and for at least two respondents, they identified similar situations. One interview participant noted that they felt that their family wanted them to succeed, but they also wanted them to help out with taking care of everyone. Another respondent went as far as to note that while their family supported what they were doing, they didn’t fully understand the investment of higher education and often mentioned to her that she needed to do more:

They are happy I came to school and want to finish...They kind of want me to work though...So I could get a house, a car, and make something of myself, something to occupy myself or something. (203)

### *Financial*

Financial constraints were identified as a barrier for nine of the participants interviewed, and for all but one of these students, the main theme regarding financial constraints as a barrier were related to family and the choice of work versus school. Having children for seven of the respondents was described as the major factor that took them away from school, and this then developed into the debate of going to school or working to take care of the family. Described by an interview participant, one understands how having a family became a financial barrier to school:

I had my first kid and I just knew I had to work. I was like, I can't come to school and support my daughter while being a single parent. I said there's no way I can do it. I've got to work, so I just kept working. (212)

The way in which financial constraints were described as a barrier often came across as a cost benefit analysis for the respondents. As the students described their situations, four of the students noted they had to see the investment was going to be worth it against what they were currently making, and one of the students stated that their current position did not require a degree and it was taking some individual motivations to justify the cost:

I'll be honest, I think that's one of the things that I said, like juggling to either continue school or working a job...it's like you know, right now I can get a pretty good job with Employer A right now, and they don't care if I have a degree or not...I guess the only thing that I understand that having higher education would give me more professional opportunities. (206)

### *Distance and Transportation*

Distance and transportation as factors affecting educational attainment were noted by some students as barriers and came up in the conversations when it came to describing past barriers and future barriers. Four of the students noted that the lack of transportation at times was and still is a barrier when it comes to their educational

journeys. All of these interview participants did note that the implementation of the shuttle service by the college really helped, and thus, transportation became less of a barrier. Distance as a barrier was brought up by four of the students in reference to the possibility of having to leave the area to further their education. From their perspective, the distance would become an issue in terms of being away from family and having to possibly relocate their children. One of the students did note that they were accepted to a nearby university and though the school may be considered relatively close to some, for this student, the distance was too much to want to deal with, and thus, they decided to stay and attend school at SWC. It was just easier and simpler to do that.

I got accepted, but then I was like that's too far, I would rather just stay home. Stay at my house, so I wouldn't have to pay for a dorm and my education...Cause, here they have a shuttle to get from A to B, you just call them and they will be there. (203)

### *Isolation and Culture Shock*

Related to distance as a barrier is isolation. Isolation and themes that fit into the category of isolation include being away from the community, family attending the same school and then leaving, and feelings of not belonging. Of the five students that mentioned isolation as a barrier or future barrier, one student described a situation at a university away from the area that became so toxic that she had to leave:

My roommate (another AI/NA student) and I were, we were our own study group. We'd go to the library and we were out on study group,

when they had three or four people working on the same lecture. We could see there was exclusion, so it was you know. And then when she left, it was difficult, and it was just downright difficult trying to get those workloads done, and I didn't have any help from the Native American club or whatever they called themselves. Unless they wanted some advice about you know, where the directional colors went, or something like that, you know then they would talk to me. Nothing useful came out of this. (213)

Another respondent had a completely different take on isolation. Where others saw being away from the community as a barrier, one student identified that it was their own personality that would create the isolation as they did not actively seek out new relationships or like to ask for help.

I might have isolated myself while being there...I'm a shy person. I don't like to go find friends. So I would probably just be stuck in my own dorm or something. (203)

Two students stated they felt that culture shock was a barrier in their time away from the area; the first one is the respondent who also mentioned isolation. The second respondent who mentioned culture shock brought it up more in the sense that they had never really spent time away from the reservation and the difference in lifestyle really affected them.

### *Lack of Preparation*

Cited throughout the literature as a barrier, lack of preparation was also identified by five of the research participants in the course of the interviews as being barriers that have kept them from academic achievement. For three of the students, lack of preparation was most evident in their math courses, and as the interviews progressed, it was clear that passing math was a major barrier for these students.

I'm struggling with math right now. I didn't really get the help in math when I went to the high schools in town here, they started the tribal schools and that's where I got, kind of the one on one help. The town school, I don't know it was different, I don't know if it was racial, I don't know, just didn't get the help there. (208)

One of the respondents mentioned that they felt the resources at SWC were enough to aid the students in their journeys; the main issue for them was asking for help. In terms of rigor, one of the respondents stated that it was not really the workload that was the issue: "it wasn't so much the amount of work, more the critical thinking that was involved, I wasn't prepared for that" (206).

### *Other Barriers Identified*

Barriers identified by either one or two of the students that did not fit any of the other categories include: course/program issues, peers, and a lack of structure. One student identified times in the past at SWC when courses had to be cancelled due to low enrollment, and this became a barrier. Another student had a similar issue in that the



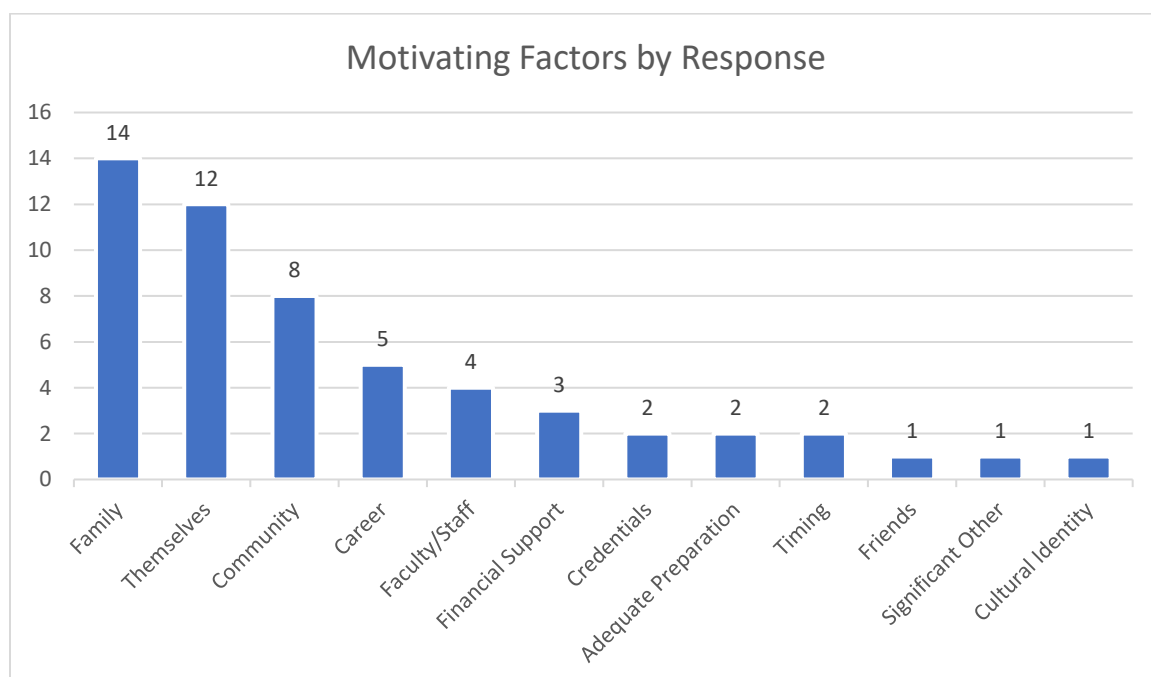
program was put on hold, which is what kept her away from higher education for a year. Lastly, one respondent identified that in their time away from the area, two of the biggest barriers were the people they chose to associate with, and the lack of structure from being away from the family.

To me it was just like, not having someone there to push me to go to class all day, you know I started getting lazy, started hanging out with the wrong crowd and stuff, and I just fell out of it I guess. (204)

### **Motivating Factors**

Motivating factors, or persistence factors as some of the literature labels them, consist of the factors that contribute to student success and educational attainment. As student success may be defined differently from student to student, this study has changed the traditional terminology from persistence factors to motivating factors highlighting the individuality of the factors that motivate Native American students. The aim of the questioning in this section of the interview was to allow students to share their own perspectives about the factors that have, are currently, or will affect their educational journey exploring one of the primary research questions of the study. The responses were interpreted and categorized into common themes. The respondents identified several motivating factors, and the chart below highlights these responses with the following sections providing further detail.

Figure 4. Breakdown of Motivating Factors by Response



### *Family*

Family was the most common motivating factor identified by the respondents.

Fourteen students described varying forms of family motivation in their responses.

These responses ranged from identifying their children as the main motivating factor, to wanting to make their parents proud. Statements regarding family as a motivating factor included: “to show my daughter I can do it”, “to be an example for other family members”, “to show my family members that it is never too late”, and “[I] want my father to be proud of me.” Expanding on this:

My family and the community...I’ve got grandchildren so I kind of want to really do good in in education to show them that, you know, they can take that path and do good in their education too. I kind of want to set

that strong example that they can keep going, if they want to, just keep furthering it, there's a lot of help out there that will help them too. (217)

To show my son, like, if my mom went to college and had me as the same time, then I can go to college. (201)

Like I said, I'm a father and I have children, another on the way, and I was just like holy crap, you know I need to get my stuff together for these kids, set a good example for them...You know I didn't have somebody that really tried to set the example for me education wise. (212)

These responses are similar to family as a theme identified as a motivating factor in the literature.

### *Themselves and Timing*

The next largest category of motivating factors identified in the interview responses is the students themselves. As a motivating factor, the individual nature of each respondent was identified to account for the varying degrees of success that may exist in each individual. This sets the analysis apart from referring to these factors as persistence factors and instead calling them motivating factors to reflect the individual nature of the framework.

Definitely for myself, and going back to you know for what I see myself doing, I feel that it could benefit the community as well. (211)

The biggest motivating factor is just me wanting to learn and keep going...I just love learning. (210)

A couple of the students stated that what it came down to was essentially a profound life change that led them back to higher education, or a life decision that had to be made.

My accident was the biggest shock. I was supposed to be out of work for like 10 months...So I mean, I'm just not a person to sit around at home and was actually my sisters and them, and a few of my family members that are going to college last year, that were going on their second year. (214)

Needing that piece of paper to prove to everyone, that you know, you got that college education just so that they can hire you on for a job. (207)

Students also stated that when it came to seeing themselves as a motivating factor to succeed, they envisioned a sense of self improvement, or as one respondent stated, "I have a level of maturity that I did not have." Two students noted that timing seemed to be one of the more important motivating factors. Though timing may not reflect as a motivating factor directly related to the respondents themselves, it is related to the individual and their current situations. One interview respondent stated that it was "something to do", indicating that it was more the situation and how it related to them

more than anything. Lastly, proving that they could persist to finish would show that they could succeed. As one respondent put it, “Yeah, that’s kind of a satisfying thing when I succeeded in classes. Kind of boosted my spirits up, and everybody in my family.”

### *Community*

Community as a motivating factor, as highlighted in the literature, centers around the students’ desire to help the community after they finish their educational programs. It was also a motivating factor in the sense that students maintained a strong connection to their communities and any support they had from the communities helped keep them moving forward. The respondents and their responses echo the responses found in the reviews of the literature and have very little variance.

Helps us to be able to educate those in the community, whether they are young or older...So if I was to go on for nursing, I would be like a home health nurse to visit the elderly, to see how their health is doing and how they are doing. (202)

Of the eight students that noted community as a motivating factor, six students specifically stated that aiding the community and working within the community to address issues were factors that kept them working towards educational achievement.

One of the students had a different take on community as a motivating factor:

I guess it’s like I said, I’ve got one friend over here, and another over here, and like four or five friends that all want to do something together, and we have business ideas...They have their fields and I have mine, so

we come together to create some sort of enterprise or business...So I guess when it comes to community, it's more building within the community. (207)

Beyond family, themselves, and community as motivating factors, the responses of the interview participants began to vary some and related responses will be grouped together.

#### *Career and Credentials*

Motivating factors that are not brought up specifically within the literature reviewed, though perhaps present, are factors related specifically to career advancement and credentials. Responses from the interview participants recognizing these two factors were framed in such a way that they did not fit within themselves as a motivating factor. This fits within the framework of capabilities approach, allowing for the research participants to tell their own stories. In total, seven participants made mention of careers/career opportunities or credentials as motivating factors in their educational journeys. For the students that identified careers, the common factor behind recognizing career as a factor was financial stability.

Motivating factor would be the different job opportunities out there, like if I moved away I could always find a job. (202)

They have like, openings where we are doing our clinicals at, so it's nice.

And there's like, not only the clinics, they have like home health that you can apply for. (201)

The two students that mentioned credentials referred to the logic that though they may have certain experience, they lacked the credentials that come with a degree. As one of those respondents put it very directly, education is a means to "Get that piece of paper."

#### *Faculty/Staff and Financial Support*

Student support systems are mentioned by a number of the studies examined in the literature review, and seven respondents in the study identified the faculty/staff at SWC and the financial support they received as factors that were motivating them to succeed. The three students that identified financial support as a motivating factor did so in the sense that there was a desire to maintain the financial support, such as Pell grants and scholarships, that they had received and the help they received from the staff in receiving financial aid was important to their success.

From this college, I know that they want me to keep going, that, that's (the focus) the whole thing with Natives and stuff. (210)

And. The other thing would be the faculty and staff here. They fought really hard for me to stay in school and I don't want to let them down. It was a huge thing for them, to you know, fight for me, you know and have faith in me. (216)

Respondents noted that the overall support at SWC was a factor in wanting to succeed, and one interview subject in particular stated that they wanted to graduate as they were, “not wanting to let them (faculty/staff) down.”

#### *Other Motivating Factors*

Five responses from the students did not fit the main themes of family, community, themselves, and support created when examining the transcribed interviews. Three of the themes highlighted do fit with motivating factors mentioned in the literature; adequate college preparation, cultural identity, and friends. Two interview participants stated that they felt that their experiences in high school had adequately prepared them for higher education, though one did mention that even though they felt prepared, the timing was just not right, and they were not mentally prepared for higher education. Friends as a motivating factor was mentioned by one student, and this was in the form of friends offering social support and wanting the respondent to succeed.

My friends and my family they tell me, that, about how proud they are of me for going to college and to keep going. (210)

Cultural identity came up as a motivating factor as the interview participant noted that it was their connection to culture that was pushing them to succeed in order to understand the culture more and the connections of culture to the outside world. The last factor of note that acts as motivation to succeed was the significant other. The



student that mentioned this as a motivating factor stated that their significant other really wanted to see them succeed and acted as a balance to aid the student in their success.

### **College and University Transferability**

Within the framework of capabilities approach, it is important to understand the place of resources and the connection to capabilities (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999).

Resources available to individuals affect the choices one can make, and it is easy to recognize commodities and hard currency as resources. Less recognizable to some are actual human ability and information as resources. When examining the overall capabilities of Native American students, and in particular the capabilities of the research population, it was important to examine the programming, financial support, and transfer opportunities for students from SWC. To accomplish this task, ten colleges and universities in the area surrounding SWC were chosen and a content analysis was conducted, exploring information as a resource in the areas of Native American programming, financial support, and transfer opportunities.

Throughout the literature, advising, mentoring, social support, and other services are identified as being factors that can affect decisions related to retention and persistence within Native American programming. Within this study, cultural isolation and an understanding of culture were mentioned by a couple of students as either reasons why they left a university or why they might be hesitant to attend a university away from the reservation. To explore the services and support related to Native American programming, the following categories were created: American Indian Studies

programs, American Indian/Native American (AI/NA) student centers, AI/NA student organizations, summer bridge programs and other mentoring/advising programs, and culturally relevant events.

Five of the schools made no specific mention of programming, either academic or student-centered, that focused on Native American students. A few of these schools did mention either offices of diversity or multicultural centers, but within the sites for diversity or the multicultural centers, nothing was mentioned regarding Native American students. The five schools that did have information regarding Native American programming made mention of advisors, mentors, summer bridge programming, technology programming, or other programs that targeted support for Native American students. Of these other five schools examined, three had dedicated American Indian student centers with staff focused on serving the populations of Native American students at the schools.

Contained in the websites of the five schools that had information for Native American programming, four schools had AI/NA related student organizations, and four also had a list of culturally relevant events. These events included: pow-wows, Native American film viewings, lectures, language and culture courses, and cooking classes. Lastly, when reviewing the websites for these schools, three had information regarding American Indian studies programs and one directly mentioned the number of Native American students present on campus. For the schools that did have information regarding Native American support programming, the information was fairly accessible and easy to find.

The next two areas of content analysis were a bit more difficult when trying to locate information and could be areas where one who does not know higher education and website navigation could have some issues. Financial reasons as a barrier are not only mentioned in the literature regarding Native American students and educational attainment, it is frequently mentioned as a barrier for all students of underrepresented populations. Throughout this study, as mentioned above, a number of students stated financial reasons as being a barrier to achieving their educational goals and this manifested itself in a number of ways. With that in mind, the websites of the colleges and universities selected were examined and explored to find information regarding tuition, tuition waivers, financial aid, scholarships, and any other information regarding the financial commitment to attending these schools.

All of the websites for all of the schools selected had information regarding tuition and financial aid that was easy to read and access. Four of the schools made no mention of any Native American specific financial aid, scholarships, or tuition waivers. Six of the schools made mention of Native American specific financial aid or scholarships, and of these six, three had very comprehensive lists of scholarships and how to apply. Of all the schools selected, only two had full tuition waivers for Native American students. One of the schools with the tuition waivers had the information very clearly stated and it was easy to find and access. The other school had the tuition waiver information outlined on their website, but it was more difficult to find. Both schools required that to qualify for the tuition waiver, students must be enrolled tribal

members, which disqualifies Native American students of lineal descent where membership is not connected to lineal descent.

Directly related to financial constraints as a barrier is the transferability of credits from two-year colleges to four-year schools. Simple math states that the fewer number of credits one has to take to finish their degree, the less money one has to spend on getting a degree. This questioning is what directed the content analysis portion that looks at the transferability of credits and programming. Information about transferability was broken down into categories related to transfer policy, transfer credit calculators, articulation agreements, and MOUs regarding academic programming. All of the schools and universities had sites outlining the transfer policies of the school and what to expect in the transfer process. Five of the schools outlined their transfer policies very clearly while the others required a bit more work in accessing information regarding transfer.

Five of the schools went beyond simply stating transfer policies and who to connect with to get an idea of transferability of credits. These schools had transfer credit calculators there were linked directly on the transfer sites located on their websites. The transfer calculators were easy to use and contained comprehensive lists of the credits that would transfer and what they would transfer as in regard to course information. Two of the schools had lists of articulation agreements on their transfer sites and though these sites did not contain agreements for SWC, they did contain information for other tribal colleges. Transfer information for SWC specifically was found within two of the schools and their websites. One of the schools had information

regarding an MOU and academic programming related to STEM fields, the other school had clear information regarding degree completion articulation agreements along with an easy to use transfer credit calculator.

#### *Capabilities, Transferability, and Future Plans*

Comparing the information found on websites of the colleges and universities explored with the goals of the research participants highlights capabilities of the students in higher education. Respondents varied in their responses on their current plans in higher education ranging from being done with school once they are done at SWC and wanting to move on to a graduate degree eventually. When discussing future educational plans, six students stated that they were not looking to do any higher education beyond SWC. It should be noted that one of these students did mention they were possibly looking at another associates degree at SWC, and one other student stated that they were thinking about another associates, possibly at a nearby school, but they had not followed up in any serious way.

Seven of 17 respondents mentioned in the interviews that they were thinking about attending higher education beyond their time at SWC, but they had not looked into any schooling or looked at any programming beyond needing to graduate from SWC. While this group of students stated that they had not gone beyond thinking about possibly attending higher education after SWC, a few did discuss barriers that could arise if they were to follow through with further educational plans. Three students that fit into this category have identified that distance would be the greatest barrier to their attending higher education off the reservation. Comparing this barrier to the schools

explored, the nearest school is 56 miles away, with the next closest being 77 to 78 miles away. This may not represent a barrier to some, but to these students, even these distances are a challenge, and one that the schools may not be able to address directly. To go along with distance, two students stated that relocating kids and family would be a barrier as they would miss out on support systems they currently have in the community; again, a barrier that schools may not be able to address.

The interviews did reveal a small number of students that were seriously looking at school beyond SWC and had followed up with opportunities they believed were present. One of the students stated that where they were at in life and the resources and support they had around them really posed no barriers. One of the students is currently taking classes from another university online and classes at SWC and saw no barriers to completion. Of the four students that mentioned they were seriously looking at continuing, only one mentioned barriers that could come up in their pursuit. In particular, the student noted that with their family, they would like to do as much online education as possible before they had to leave the area. The schools mentioned compared to the programming and what the student has looked into would make this possible, and thus, increasing the student's capabilities. When asked if they were willing to leave the area, the student mentioned that they were willing and that they believed they had sufficient resources to succeed.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion**

As diversity increases in higher education and understanding how to effectively serve diverse populations continues to be an issue for many institutions, the push to understand barriers and motivating factors of underrepresented populations should be a primary area of interest for institutions of higher education. While increasing, the depth of research in the area of Native American educational attainment, and barriers and motivating factors in this area, is still relatively small when compared to understanding other underrepresented populations of students. The purpose of this research is to explore and add to the understanding of barriers and motivating factors of Native American students in higher education. Additionally, rather than make assumptions, the research aims to capture capabilities in the form of real opportunities from the perspectives of Native American students themselves. This final chapter first summarizes the findings and compares barriers and motivating factors from the analysis to those listed in the review of the literature. Then, it provides an overview of recommendations highlighting directions institutions in higher education can take to better serve this population of students. Limitations of the study will then be covered, followed by recommendations for future research that arise from the study.

### **Summary of Findings**

Capabilities approach highlights the importance of the freedoms and capabilities when exploring the well-being of individuals. Capabilities can range from the very basic, access to nutritional food or just food in general, to the more abstract, such as the ability to develop critical thinking skills. Interviews conducted through the course of the

study helped to identify that on the surface, educational capabilities for the research population revolved around degree attainment and the possibility of expanding career choice. A more in-depth examination of the interview responses reveals capabilities related to the development of critical thinking skills and an expanding of opportunities for growth. Educational attainment's relationship to capabilities includes not just attainment as a capability, but also as a resource related to personal ability and informational expansion.

#### *Notes on Context and Sample*

Mentioned throughout the body of this study is the idea that capabilities and an understanding of capabilities should be examined through the lens of local knowledge. As highlighted in some of the findings, themes, such as family as a barrier, are present in the literature and in this analysis, but the definition of family as a barrier differs from what is highlighted in the literature and what was described by a number of the research participants. As noted in the sample section of the methods chapter, the research population for this study is fairly small when compared to the general population. According to the 2000 US Census, there were 10,408 people on the Lake Traverse Reservation and of those 33.2% identified as AI/NA. The total population of Sisseton Wahpeton College is around 220 students and a high estimate of the number of students who are tribal members, according to a faculty member, is around 70%. So, while the sample selected seems small, it is an appropriate size when compared to the total research population. Lastly, it is also important to not the principles described earlier outlining research with indigenous and Native American populations. This study



took care to balance the importance of gaining greater knowledge in the subject area with methods that reflect the interests of the community. Capabilities approach and its focus on local knowledge and multidisciplinary understanding make it an appropriate theoretical framework for working with Native populations.

### *Resources*

Exploring available resources, most of the students felt that their access to resources were not limited when it came to their original goals within higher education. Though around a third of the students did feel that there was a general lack of information (as a resource) when it comes to opportunities in higher education. When compared to their original goals, all of the students noted that the support systems and resources available to them did not limit their capabilities in higher education. The main area of concern then from the information gathered in this study is more in the conversion factors (barriers and motivating factors) for students when it comes to the ability to turn capabilities into reality.

### *Barriers*

Interview participants highlighted a number of barriers present for them in higher education (some in their past and some current), and these barriers were identified as factors that took them away from higher education, kept them out of higher education, and affected success in higher education. A comparison with barriers noted in the literature review highlights several barriers identified by the students that match what was outlined in the review of literature. These barriers include financial restrictions, cultural conflict, isolation, a lack of adequate preparation, and family. While

most of the interview responses match many of the responses noted in the literature review, family as a barrier differed. It was less about family pulling students away from higher education and more about having to take care of children and attempting to balance the financial responsibilities of being a parent with being a student.

Barriers identified in the analysis not highlighted or not having a prevalent presence in the literature included individual barriers, course and program issues, and a lack of structure. Where community was mentioned as a barrier in terms of being pulled back to the community or feelings of resentment/jealousy in terms of the literature; the interview participants did not identify community in this sense as being a barrier, and for the most part, the respondents noted community as a motivating factor. Lastly, one barrier to note is that at least one of the interview participants noted feelings of not belonging and discrimination while they were a student at a university off the reservation. This is a feeling that was echoed in some of the responses from students in the review of literature and should be noted in possible future research.

### *Motivating Factors*

Through the course of the interviews, the research participants identified a number of motivating factors that contributed to their educational success, are currently present, or motivated them to get back into higher education. As with the review of literature, some of the themes highlighted as barriers could also be highlighted as motivating factors, such as family and financial, depending on the students' situations and perceptions. Motivating factors found both within the literature review and identified by the students include family, financial support, institutional

support (faculty/staff), and community support. Integration as a motivating factor was not mentioned by any of the interview participants even though it was common in the literature review, and the same can be said about mentoring and advising. It is possible this was not addressed as it was a small sample size and only six students had attended higher education off the reservation.

One of the more prominent motivating factors identified by the interview participants was themselves, and primarily, the need to prove to themselves that they could finish what they started in higher education. Other motivating factors identified by the research participants, but not noted in the review of literature, were the desire for credentials, significant others, and simple timing. From the perspectives of the interview participants, the main motivating factors within higher education were family, themselves, and community. There was often some crossover for students when discussing these three themes, and for three respondents, while noting themselves as a motivating factor, they connected their well-being to their families and the ability to help the community.

### *Recommendations*

The smaller sample size does not lend itself to any real concrete recommendations, though there were some barriers and motivating factors that stuck out as the most prominent. Within the barrier of the family, children and the need to take care of the family often connected directly to financial constraints as barriers. This is not an issue that is isolated to Native American communities and tribal college students, as it is prevalent for students at universities and community colleges across

the country. Addressing the issue through childcare programming is one way to help students alleviate the difficulty of finding help with children, but it does not address the problem of attempting to balance taking care of a family with being a student. The more difficult structural issue for students attempting this balance is finding work that pays enough and has a schedule that is flexible enough to accommodate attendance at a higher educational facility. Evening classes could be offered, but in the environment of the tribal college where many of the instructors and students live in rural areas, night classes may not be feasible. A possible fix could be to adjust scheduling to resemble more block scheduling and to provide some form of childcare. Students could get several courses scheduled in two or three days and still maintain a work schedule.

Lack of preparation was also a barrier noted by interview participants, and specifically, the respondents noted it was the rigor, lack of information, and lack of the development of critical thinking skills. While the research examined in the review of literature noted that summer bridge programming and other programming aimed at preparing students for higher education showed some success, another approach could prove helpful. Dual-credit and concurrent enrollment classes are growing in popularity and offer high school students the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school. Partnerships between colleges and high schools could provide the means to create programming where college instructors either teach directly in high schools, or where high school teachers with advanced degrees could teach under the direction of colleges. Tribal colleges could work with local tribal high schools on programming to increase the offerings of these courses, thus increasing the students' exposure to higher

education while at the same time introducing the rigor and critical thinking skills needed to succeed in higher education.

The final recommendation would require the increase of partnerships between tribal colleges and traditional four-year colleges and universities. While there has been a growth of online educational programming providing opportunity for those who would like to maintain their current situations in life, some students may struggle with or oppose the idea of completing higher education online. As distance and isolation were two barriers noted by a number of the interview participants, the reality of them leaving to further their education seems to be less of a possibility. To increase the capabilities of Native American students and increase the connection to tribal communities, four-year colleges and universities could look at working with tribal colleges to introduce distance programs through executive delivery style courses utilizing a hybrid model of online and in-seat requirements. Creating this link to the communities would serve not just the tribal communities and colleges, but also four-year colleges and universities.

### **Limitations**

As this research study is exploratory in nature, there was no attempt to provide any direct conclusions as to why Native American educational attainment is so much lower than the general population. The research did aim to answer some questions regarding capabilities, barriers, and motivating factors, and it was conducted in such a manner as to provide the greatest depth of information possible. This did not leave the research without limitations however, and the following section will highlight the limitations of the study.

The first limitation that needs to be noted is the generalizability of the study and findings. Generalizability is not necessarily the aim of capabilities approach and as stated by Sen (1999), capabilities approach should be focused on local knowledge and context. That being said, there are others within the approach (such as Nussbaum) who do see some benefit to standard or common capabilities, and as such, see the benefit in some form of generalizability. The vast diversity of Native American communities and tribal groups makes generalizability difficult, so a more Senian approach was adopted as the main theoretical framework with some elements of Nussbaum's thoughts on commonalities within capabilities included. Recognizing the sampling procedure and sample size do not reflect the possibility of generalizations, this dissertation's aim was simply to add to the information regarding Native American educational attainment and the barriers and motivating factors connected to educational attainment.

The next limitation is reflected in the small sample size of the research study. Originally, the N for the sample size was set at a minimum of 20 research participants. Through the course of the research though, the possibility of reaching the N of 20 research participants became much more difficult to achieve in the time set for the study. The first issue that arose in finding research interview participants was simply finding students, current or former, that fit the parameters of the population. As the interviews started in the summer semester, there was a very small number of students in and around SWC, and of those who were in attendance, only a portion of those actually fit the population needed. The second issue of note was one of gaining trust. Relationships had been developed with faculty, staff, and some students, but finding

students willing to open up and discuss their educational journeys turned out to be a more difficult task than originally envisioned. Key informants did prove valuable in the long run, yet even then, finding students willing to participate limited the number of interviews that were completed in this phase of the research. This was reflected in the responses of a couple of students after the interviews were complete when they stated, "That wasn't so bad." The third issue that limited the number of interviews was weather. Extreme weather conditions forced the school to close a number of days the researcher was present, and as many of the students, current and former, live in rural areas, the weather greatly hindered their ability to travel. Even if interviews had been set up, due to inclement weather and a lack of access to technology in some areas, it may have been impossible to complete these interviews.

The last limitation that will be covered is related to online education and technology. Analysis of the interviews provided a good depth of information regarding barriers and motivating factors from the perspectives of Native American students at SWC, but what it did not cover is the thoughts and perspectives of students regarding online education. While a couple of the interview participants mentioned they had taken an online class (and one is currently in an online degree program), the thoughts of the other students regarding online education was not explored. This is important when examining the capabilities of students as access to high-speed internet, an understanding of technology, and information about online opportunities all contribute to the capabilities of the interview participants

## **Future Research**

The first area of future research that needs to be explored is in furthering this research design to include more interviews and a quantitative section that will reach a greater number of the research population. This opportunity is already in development, making future research a reality, as this dissertation is just a part of a larger, more encompassing research project aimed at understanding barriers and motivating factors of Native American students at Sisseton Wahpeton College. An important component of the research project developed at SWC is the creation and implementation of a research internship aimed at providing SWC students with research education, training, and experience. The creation of a research internship for Native American students at SWC fits within the framework of capabilities approach as it increases the capabilities of not only the students themselves, but it also increases the capabilities of the community and the college. In the process of working with the Sisseton Wahpeton Tribal Research Office, the improvement of the research capacity of the local community was a goal, and the research internship component fits well with their mission.

The second area of future research concerns implementing the research design, research internship, and overall research project in other Native American communities and at other tribal colleges. Capabilities approach aims to increase the overall freedoms and capabilities of communities and individuals. Implementing the research in other areas with other tribal groups will add to the depth of research in this area, and thus, could be used to increase capabilities of Native American individuals and communities. Conducting the research using the same theoretical framework could yield new



knowledge about barriers, motivating factors, and capabilities within higher education for Native American populations. Allowing Native American populations to share their own perspectives can provide direction for institutions serving Native Americans and how to serve Native American populations better in higher education.

The third area of future research that comes from this study would be to explore and compare capabilities, barriers, and motivating factors of Native American students from traditional communities to those of Native American students from urban areas and culturally diverse areas. Comparing the resources of Native American students who attend tribal schools to the resources of Native American students who attend urban high schools or high schools with diverse populations, such as Wagner High School (located in Wagner, South Dakota on the Yankton Sioux Reservation), and the perceived capabilities of these student populations would be a starting point to understanding what some schools are missing and need to address. In addition to comparing the resources and capabilities of these populations, it would also be beneficial to compare the barriers and motivating factors present in higher education for these populations. Differences in barriers and motivating factors for these populations could aid in serving students while they are in higher education by understanding what could be addressed prior to the arrival of students in higher education and what would need to be addressed within the structure of higher education.

The last area of future research that will be suggested would be to explore further the thoughts and perspectives of Native American students regarding online education. As stated above, this is one area that was covered only in passing during the

course of the interviews, and with growing levels of technology, it is important to understand the students' thoughts and perceptions of technology. This includes examining the students understanding of technology, the students access to technology and technological training, the students access to online education, and the students access to information about online education. Expanding technological access and understanding could greatly increase the opportunities within higher education, and therefore increase their capabilities within higher education. If acknowledged by Native American students, this is a capability they would welcome.

### **Conclusion**

The addition of capabilities approach to studying educational opportunities and educational attainment of Native American students provides an avenue to gain a greater depth of knowledge of the issues facing these students from the perspective of the students themselves. Instead of taking an approach where one relies strictly on previous research and literature, capabilities approach addresses the issues of conversion factors within a local context. The framework can serve as the basis for a workable research design that can be implemented across various settings, placing the power to determine important capabilities in the hands of the people, local communities, and tribal groups.

Expanding on this research through the implementation of the larger research design at Sisseton Wahpeton College will hopefully yield a greater depth of knowledge and information on educational opportunities and attainment for Native American students. Long-term, the applicability of capabilities approach and information gathered

can be used by SWC to address the barriers affecting student success, and to work to build off the existing motivating factors. This completed study provides a starting point to develop further inquiry through capabilities approach into capabilities valued by the community and how institutions of higher education can provide programming to turn capabilities into reality, to explore resources to expand on capabilities of the community, and ways to address conversion factors identified by local populations.

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## Appendices

**Table 1. Barriers Identified in Reviews of Literature**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Financial Constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funding</li> <li>• Lack of information about funding</li> <li>• Poverty</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Cultural Conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of institutional understanding of culture</li> <li>• Lack of integration into a new culture</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Collins 2013; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Prejudice/Racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campus climate</li> <li>• Perceived negative stereotypes in courses</li> </ul>	Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013
Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Lack of comfort with faculty/staff</li> <li>• Being away from community and family</li> </ul>	DeLong, Monetten, and Ozaki 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Lack of Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failing to comprehend the rigor</li> <li>• Questions of belonging academically</li> <li>• Lack of adequate study skills</li> </ul>	Larimore and McClellan 2005; Martinez 2014; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016
Lack of Family Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jealousy</li> <li>• Pull from the family to return to the community</li> </ul>	Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013; Simi and Matusitz 2016



**Table 2. Motivating Factors Identified in Reviews of Literature**

<b>Motivating Factors</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Financial Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From family</li> <li>• From tribal resources</li> <li>• Scholarships</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013
Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling welcome</li> <li>• Understanding of mixing of cultural values/beliefs</li> <li>• Involvement on campus</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Larimore and McClellan 2005
Mentoring and Advising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with Native American mentor</li> <li>• Positivity of mentors</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> </ul>	Adelman et al. 2013; Delong et al. 2016; Martinez 2014
Family Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push to be successful</li> <li>• Emphasis on education</li> </ul>	Collins 2013; Delong et al. 2016; Lopez 2018; Mosholder and Goslin 2013
Institutional Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of culture</li> <li>• Understanding of importance of family/community</li> <li>• Culturally relevant activities for students</li> </ul>	Collins 2013; Delong et al. 2016; Lopez 2018; Martinez 2014
Academic Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridge programming</li> <li>• Preparation in high school</li> </ul>	DeLong et al. 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Lopez 2018
Connection to Culture and Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to give back to community</li> <li>• Strong ties to traditional culture</li> <li>• Strong cultural identity</li> </ul>	DeLong et al. 2016; Larimore and McClellan 2005; Lopez 2018

**Table 3. Barriers Identified in Analytical Review of Research Articles**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Lack of Native American Faculty/Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation</li> <li>• Cultural misunderstandings</li> <li>• Comfort/relatability</li> </ul>	Cross, Day, Gogliotti, and Pung 2013; Flynn, Duncan, and Jorgensen 2012; Makomenaw 2012
Lack of Institutional Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of understanding of expectations</li> <li>• Lack of adequate advising</li> <li>• Lack of understanding of culture</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2012; Shotton, Oosahwe, and Cintron 2007
Family <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family obligations</li> <li>• Jealousy</li> <li>• Decision making</li> </ul>	Flynn, Olson, and Tellig 2014; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lee, Donlan, and Brown 2010; Makomenaw 2014
Prejudice/Racism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stereotypes</li> <li>• Misinformation</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Flynn et al. 2014; Makomenaw 2012
Conflict with Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To assimilate or not</li> <li>• “Trapped between worlds”</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Huffman and Ferguson 2007; Watson 2009
Isolation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Being away from home</li> <li>• Marginalization</li> </ul>	Cross et al. 2013; Guillory 2009; Makomenaw 2014; Saunders 2011; Thompson, Johnson-Jennings, and Nitzmarim 2013
Financial Constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Cost of education</li> <li>• Lack of information and understanding of financial aid</li> </ul>	Clark 2012; Flynn et al. 2012; Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Lee, et al. 2010; Saunders 2011
Lack of Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of preparation in tribal schools for higher education</li> <li>• Lack of resources</li> <li>• Lack of bridge or college prep programming</li> </ul>	Belgarde and Lore 2003; Clark 2012; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008

**Table 4. Motivating Factors Identified in the Review of Research articles**

<b>Motivating Factors</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<b>Family Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouragement for educational success</li> <li>• Wanting to be a good example</li> <li>• Support system to combat cultural conflict</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Jackson et al. 2003; Lee et al. 2010; Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, and Baysden 2000; Makomenaw 2014; Reyes 2000; Smith, Metz, Moyer, Cech, and Huntoon 2014; Thompson et al. 2013
<b>Social Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Campus staff/faculty</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Flynn et al. 2012; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Jackson et al. 2003
<b>Presence of Native American Faculty/Staff and General Faculty/Staff Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust and comfort</li> <li>• Relatability</li> <li>• Validation</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Mosholder, Waite, Larson, and Goslin 2016; Motl, Multon, and Zhao 2018; Reyes 2000
<b>Connection to Community and Culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to give back</li> <li>• Acting in the best interest of the community</li> <li>• Connection to the campus, creating a sense of community</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Belgarde and Lore 2003; Clark 2012; Ferguson 2007; Flynn et al. 2014; Guillory 2009; Guillory and Wolverton 2008; Makomenaw 2014; Montgomery et al. 2000; Motl et al. 2018; Reyes 2000; Shotton et al. 2007; Smith et al. 2014; Thompson et al. 2013
<b>Mentor Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positivity</li> <li>• Creates an environment of support</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Clark 2012; Makomenaw 2012; Montgomery et al. 2000; Mosholder et al. 2016; Shotton et al. 2007
<b>Individual Motivations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater career choices</li> <li>• Personal growth</li> <li>• Validation</li> </ul>	Bass and Harrington 2014; Clark 2012; Jackson et al. 2003; Reyes 2000; Saunders 2011; Watson 2009
<b>Sense of Belonging</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling welcomed</li> <li>• Feeling appreciated</li> </ul>	Mosholder et al. 2016; Motl et al. 2018; Silver Wolf and Butler-Barnes 2015
<b>Financial Support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family financial support</li> <li>• Tribal financial support</li> </ul>	Makomenaw 2012; Montgomery et al. 2000; Reyes 2000

**Table 5. Common Barriers and Motivating Factors Found in Reviews of Literature and Research**

<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Motivating Factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Constraints</li> <li>• Cultural Conflict</li> <li>• Prejudice/Racism</li> <li>• Isolation</li> <li>• Lack of Preparation</li> <li>• Family/Lack of Family Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Support</li> <li>• Financial Support</li> <li>• Mentoring/Advising</li> <li>• Integration/Sense of Belonging</li> <li>• Connection to Community/Culture</li> <li>• Institutional Support/Presence of Native American Faculty and Staff</li> </ul>

**Table 6. Barriers and Motivating Factors Needing Further Exploration**

<b>Barriers</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Native American Faculty/Staff</li> <li>• Lack of Institutional Support</li> <li>• Individualism vs Culture</li> <li>• Differences in Stated Cultural Goals</li> </ul>
<b>Motivating Factors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Support</li> <li>• Academic Preparation</li> <li>• Cultural Sensitivity of non-Native American Faculty/Staff</li> <li>• Access to Technology and Technology Training</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Capabilities Approach Model

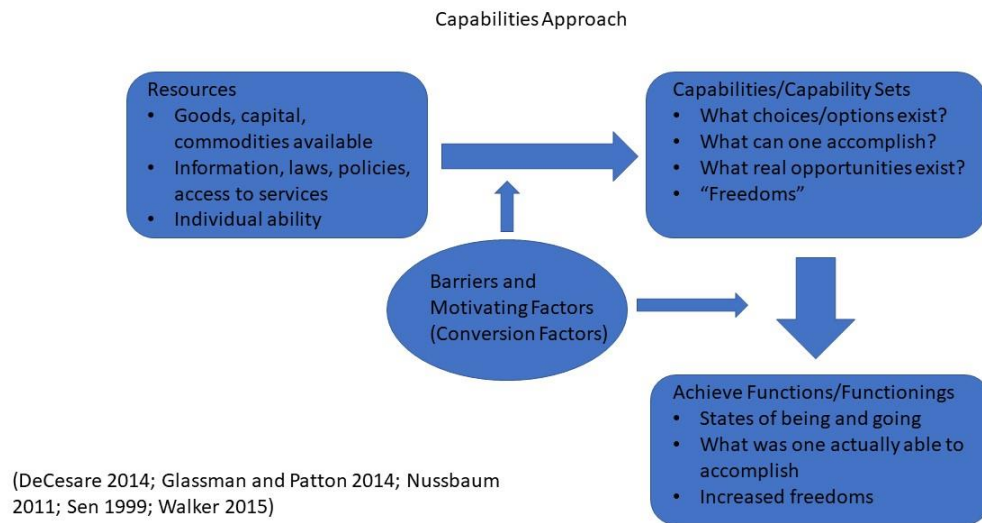
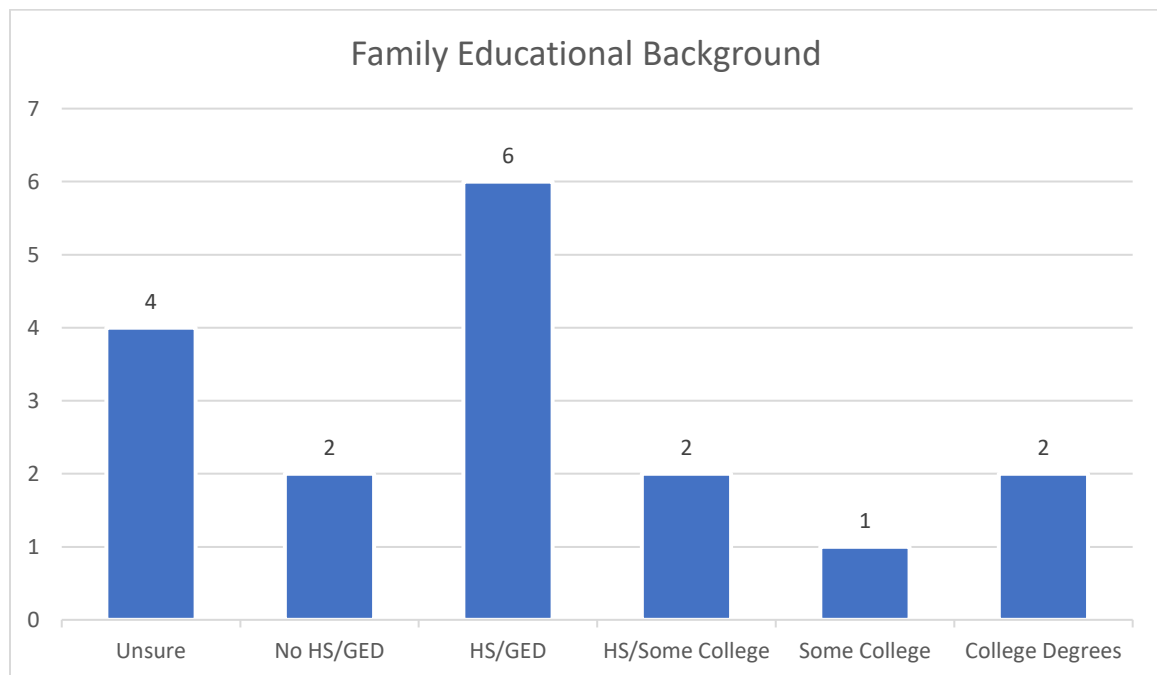
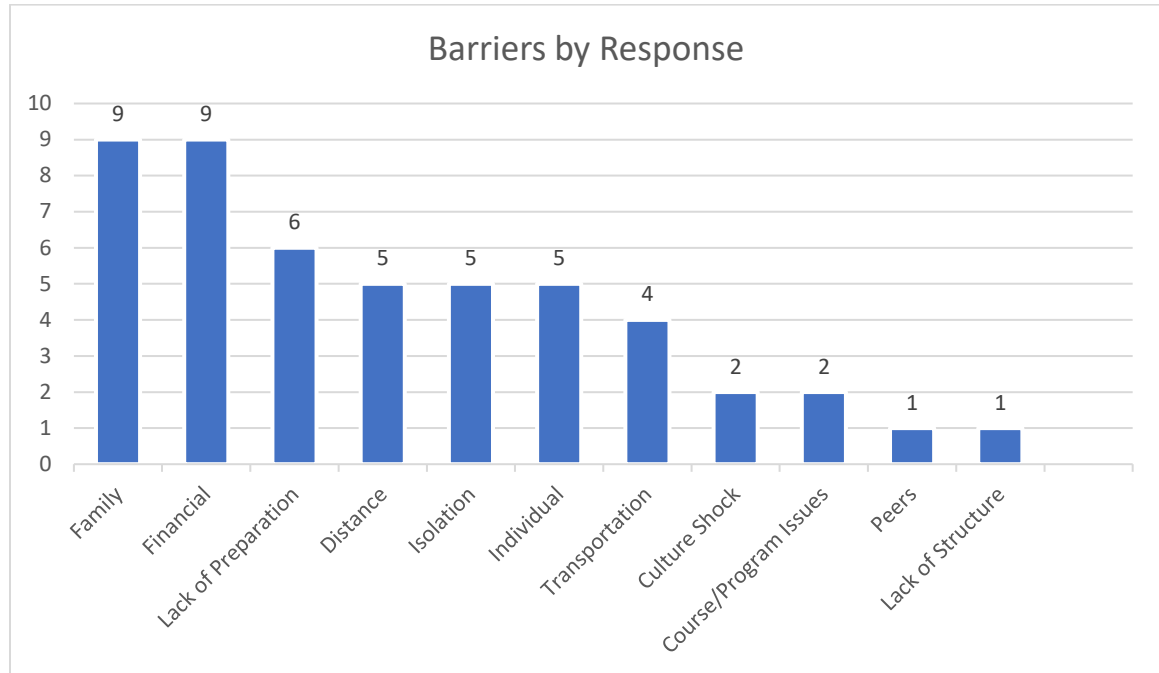


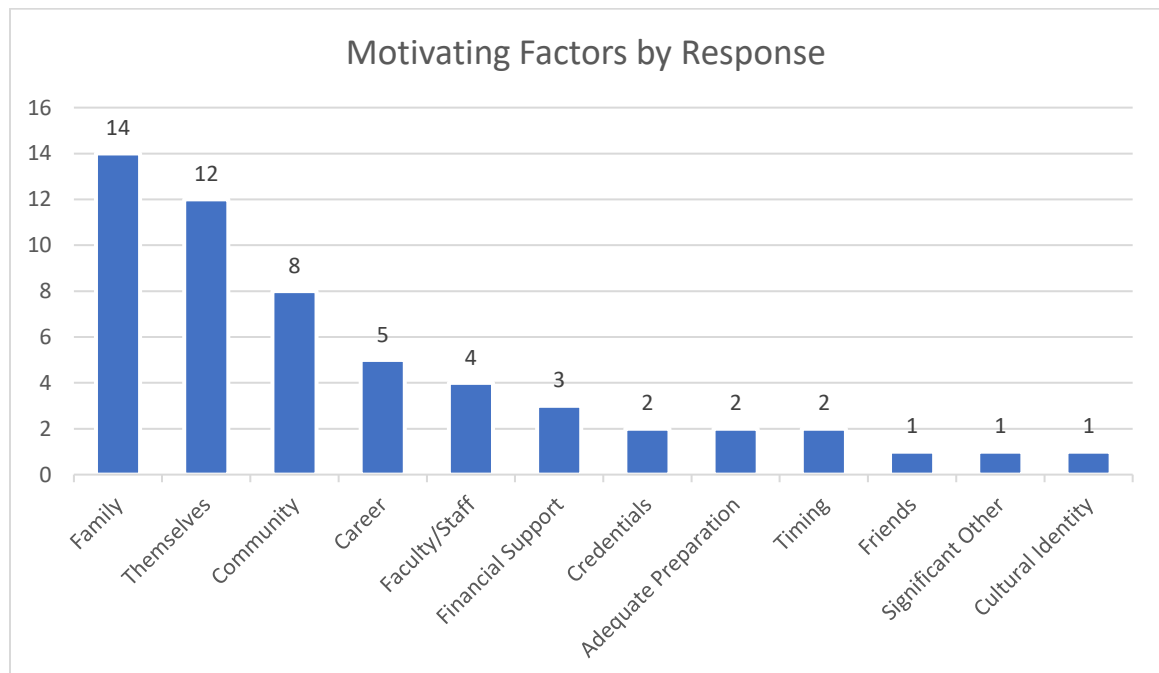
Figure 2. Breakdown of Family Educational Background/Level



*Figure 3. Breakdown of Barriers by Response*



*Figure 4. Breakdown of Motivating Factors by Response*



Focus Group Guide Questions  
Sisseton Wahpeton College  
South Dakota State University.

- 1) What are the educational backgrounds of your families? How many first generation college students?
- 2) What are your general perceptions and attitudes towards higher education?
- 3) When thinking back on your educational experiences, what were or still are your goals within higher education?
- 4) What barriers did you or have you encountered working towards those goals?
- 5) What motivating factors were or are still present as you work towards those goals?
- 6) Thinking about your overall well-being and perceived freedoms, how important is higher education to your overall well-being and perceived freedoms?

This project has been approved by the SDSU Institutional Review Board, Approval No.: IRB-1705014-EXP

This project has been approved by the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Local Research Review Board:SWO-2017-009

Interview Instrument  
Examining Matriculation, Transfer, and Capabilities of Tribal College Students in the  
form of Educational Opportunities

Primary Investigator: Francis (Frank) Arpan  
Sisseton Wahpeton College  
South Dakota State University.

Hello and thank you for your time. My name is Frank Arpan and I am a PhD student at South Dakota State University. This interview is a part of the data collection for a research project that is being run by myself and Sisseton Wahpeton College. The purpose of this research project is to explore motivating factors, barriers, and attitudes regarding higher education from the tribal student's perspectives. Long-term the data collected will be used by Sisseton Wahpeton College to better serve the students and community.

- 1) When you think of higher education, what are your general attitudes and perceptions towards higher education?
  - a. Could you please describe your educational journey?
  - b. Do you feel as though you had sufficient resources to make an informed choice regarding your higher education options?
- 2) What is your family background with higher education? What is/are your family's levels of educational attainment?
- 3) When thinking back on your educational experiences, what were your original goals within higher education? Have those goals changed any? If so, what have they changed to and what brought about the change?
  - a. If planning on continuing education beyond what SWC can offer, have you explored what opportunities universities or other colleges offer for degree completion or matriculation into their schools? What have you



found? Do you feel these opportunities are attainable or fit your educational goals?

- 4) In your educational journey, what were/are some of the barriers (financial, family, community, new experiences, isolation, etc.) that have arisen? If you originally attended higher education away from SWC, what barriers existed? Do any of those barriers still exist?
  - a. If attended a college/university away from the community/reservation, do you feel your high school experiences prepared you for higher education?
- 5) If you took time away from higher education what kept you away? What changed to bring you back into higher education?
- 6) What motivating factors (family, community, individual motivation, university support, etc.) were or are still present as you work towards those goals?
- 7) Thinking about your overall well-being and perceived freedoms, how important is higher education? Do you feel that education and higher education in particular can lead to greater opportunities professionally and otherwise?